

GARY
TZU



Contents

<u>The Revelation of St. Gary</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>The Underpass</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>The Mid-Watch</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>Sparks</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>The Critique of Fermented Reason</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>Sparks (Reprise)</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>Gary Tzu</u>	<u>69</u>

THE REVELATION OF ST. GARY

I, Gary, your brother in faith and companion in the Kingdom of God, was in the isle of Patmos seeking the Word of God. I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day when I heard behind me a great voice, as of a mighty trumpet, saying: I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, and: What thou seest, write in a book and send it unto the faithful of all the World. I turned to see the Voice that had spoken to me, and turning I beheld the Countenance of God in all His Glory. And opening His mouth, He spoke to me, saying —Hey, man, wha's happ'nin'.

Shocked, I was unable to answer for some time but finally managed to blurt out —What is this, some kind of joke? Who are You?

—God.

—I mean really. Who are You really?

—God... You know, the Ruler of the Universe, the Creator, the Almighty.

—But... but... You don't talk like God. God's supposed to say stuff like Yea Verily and stuff like that.

—Listen, I'm God and I can talk any way I damn well please!!

And the very Heavens and Earth shook in His anger, and lightning bolts shot across the sky.

—Okay, okay, I'm sorry I asked.

Thereupon, God invited me to sit beside Him and to ask Him anything I desired to know, for all things would be revealed unto me.

—Tell me, who's gonna win the Derby this year?

—Not that kind of thing.

—Well, You said anything.

—That's not anything!

Seeing my questioning look, He continued —It's not anything if I say it's not. I'm God, you know. Now ask Me something religious or profound or something.

—Okay, I have a good one. This is something I've always wondered about. When You cast Lucifer out of Heaven, why didn't You destroy him or at least render him powerless? Why did You let him come down to Earth and tempt people? I mean after all, aren't we Your children and don't You love us and aren't You strong enough to destroy the Devil?

But again, even before I had finished speaking, the Earth was shaking and lightning was flashing across the sky. In a booming, deafening voice, God thundered —You better watch what you say!! Remember, I'm a vengeful God!!!

I was unable to reply, shaking violently in a fear for my very soul. Then when God had finally regained His composure, He spoke to me again, saying —I tell you what. You're not doing so well at this, so I'll ask the questions for you until you get the hang of it. Let's see now

—Tell me, where's Jesus? I thought he was supposed to be sitting at your right hand in Heaven. Is he out on assignment or something? —Jesus? Jesus? —You remember, that Jewish fella a couple thousand years ago, went around breaking the Sabbath, throwing money lenders out of the temple, finally got himself lynched? —Oh, that Jesus. —Now you got the hang of it? Go ahead and ask me about Jesus.

—Okay, tell me, where's Jesus?

—Damned if I know.

There followed a silence during which I was at a complete loss as to what to ask next. But then God spoke again. —Well?

—Well, what?

—Well, aren't you going to ask Me another question?

—I don't know what to ask next.

—Ask the obvious one.

—Obvious one? What obvious one?

—The obvious question that follows the last one... Don't you see it?... Ask Me about the resurrection.

—Okay, tell me about the resurrection.

—What about it?

—I don't know. You told me to ask You about it.

—Of course I did. Don't you realize the importance of the resurrection? I mean, it *made* Christianity. Because before Paul and his buddies started spreading that story around, Jesus was just another small-time guru who never had more than a handful of followers. It was the resurrection story that made the whole religion.

—Oh, I see. So now I'm supposed to ask You if he really rose from the dead.

—That's right. Now you're catching on.

—Well?

—Well!!!!? Don't you go welling at Me!! I'm God, you know!! If anyone's gonna do any welling around here, it's Me!

—I was just waiting for an answer.

—Answer? You haven't asked a question yet. If you don't start shaping up on this question and answer bit, I may just have to cast you into the Eternal Fires of Hell!!

—Please don't do anything rash. I'll try harder, I promise You. So here goes: Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

—What kind of ridiculous question is that? Don't you know that it's impossible to rise from the dead?

—Then he didn't?

—I didn't say that. It's impossible to rise from the dead, but then Jesus did a lot of impossible things. After all, things are only impossible until you understand how they're done.

—Then he did?

—I didn't say that either. Don't go putting words into My mouth!

—But You won't say that he did and You won't say that he didn't. What kind of answer is that?

—It's the only one you're going to get. Do you think that anything *really* happened, that there's a fixed and unchanging past? Do you think that the past doesn't change as present belief-patterns change? Do you think that there's any past other than what people believe happened?

—Well... yeah... I guess...

—You guess!?! You guess!!!?

—I don't know. I'm only human.

—Yes, and stupid!!

I didn't know what to say to that one. I wanted to punch Him out, but somehow it didn't seem like a good idea. I could see that God was waiting for another question, so I started. —So the resurrection...

—The resurrection was a real grandstand play. Jesus had to perform his miracles to get people's attention since they wouldn't have listened to him without them, but the resurrection was going a bit too far. Why just look at how it distorted the whole religion. Because nobody ever really thinks about what Jesus had to say, about gentleness and love. They just think of him as the guy on the cross. And he made another big mistake when he based all his teachings on

faith. He didn't realize that that's as dangerous as playing with dynamite and matches at the same time. Faith works wonders. It can heal the sick and raise the dead. But it also dulls the mind and senses and turns people into half-blind sheep.

—So Jesus blew it?

—Yes, like all you humans, he was a victim of his culture. His whole culture was centered around Faith and Thou Shalt and Thou Shalt Not, and so that was the way he taught. He just laid down a new law instead of explaining things.

—And You're saying that the law doesn't really matter, that following all the rules in the Bible is a bunch of bunk?

—Not completely, because if people follow them, at least it keeps the crime-rate down.

I didn't know how to respond to that answer, so I didn't say anything until, seeing God nodding and winking at me to go on, I decided to try another topic. —Something I'd like to know is what happens to us after death. What exactly is in the Great Beyond?

—That's for Me to know and you to find out!

God began laughing uproariously at His joke. He seemed to think it was hilarious. And when He caught his breath long enough to continue, He said —I'll tell you one thing, there'll be a lot of disappointed Christians.

And at that, He laughed even harder. He laughed so hard that He made Himself cough, and cough again, and again, until His fit of laughter became a coughing fit. Once He finally stopped coughing, though, He spoke calmly. —I don't see how I could possibly explain what happens after death to someone like you who doesn't even understand what happens before death.

Seeing that He didn't want to say anything more on that subject, I figured it was time to ask Him about something else. And as I was beginning to feel brave, feel like I was starting to get onto His good side, I decided to go ahead and take a chance. —I still want to know why You didn't destroy the Devil.

—Devil! Devil!! Devil!!! You seem to have the Devil on your mind! What are you, some kind of pervert?

—I'm just curious, that's all. Why didn't You destroy him?

—If you must know, I didn't destroy him because I couldn't. Now let's get back to the subject of faith and belief...

—You couldn't? I thought God could do anything.

—I *can* do anything, like I can turn your tongue into a half-ton of shit if you don't stop interrupting Me!

—Then why can't You destroy the Devil?

—Okay, you persistent son-of-a-bitch, I'll tell you. I can't destroy the Devil because I *am* the Devil.

—But how can You be the Devil? I thought You were God.

—I *am* God, *and* I'm the Devil.

—You mean You're schizo?

—No, I'm both at the same time. It's all a matter of how you look at Me. You know the old saying: the Devil is in the eye of the beholder.

—Devil? I thought beauty was in the eye of the beholder.

—Same difference.

Seeing my blank expression, He continued. —You know, God's beautiful and the Devil's ugly, God's good and the Devil's evil.

—So You're saying that the difference between those things is an illusion, that they're really the same thing? You're saying that You're Your own negative, that You're both God and anti-God?

—Yes, that's about the size of it.

—But why do You make people believe that God and the Devil are separate? Why do You make people believe You're two different beings?

—Me? I don't make people believe that. People are responsible for their own beliefs.

—But You don't do anything to discourage it.

—There's nothing I can do. Beliefs aren't My department. Besides, I find it rather flattering to have people believe that I'm pure good and beauty. I see no harm in them believing that evil and ugliness come from someone else.

And God smiled a disgustingly vain, self-satisfied smile. Then He spoke again. —Now if you're done, let's get back to what we were discussing before we got into all this Devil business.

—Oh, about the power of faith?... I'm afraid I don't know what to ask.

—You are an unimaginative little twerp, aren't you? Well, I'll ask you one then. Do you notice anything funny about My appearance?

Funny? I looked Him up and down, trying to find something unusual, although it was a bit hard to say since He was the first God I'd ever seen. But no, He looked just like the pictures.

—No You look just like I always thought You'd look.

—That's what I mean. I look just like you thought I would. And My personality is even as schizophrenic as you thought. Now isn't that strange?

—Yeah, I guess it is...

—And if someone else saw Me, I'd look and act just like *he* thought I would.

—And what if an atheist saw You?

—I don't want to talk about that.

—Why not? Tell me, what would You look like to someone who didn't believe in You?

—I said I don't want to talk about it! Now drop it!!

—Why are You so touchy about that question? Is it because You wouldn't exist to someone who didn't believe in You?

—I said I don't... Hey, remember you're talking to God!! You'd better start showing a little respect!

—Oh, I'm sorry... *Please* tell me.

God didn't answer. He was pouting, waiting for more, so I continued. —Please, Your Almightyness... Your Wonderfulness...

—Now that's better. Since you ask that way, I'll answer: maybe.

—Maybe? What do You mean maybe?

—I mean: sort of.

—Hmm... Let's try another question: do You only exist because people believe in You?... Please... Your Wonderfulness.

—Yes, but there's more to it.

—What?

—People only exist because *I* believe in *them*... You shouldn't go thinking that either of us has any real, substantial existence. I say I'm God and you're human, but that doesn't mean that either actually exists; God, human, these are only figures of speech.

THE UNDERPASS

Gary opened his eyes to find the weak daylight of early dawn. He had an aching pain in his hip and shoulder that came from having lain on one side too long, and in fact his whole body was sore from having spent the night on a rock-hard bed: a concrete ledge just below the support-beams of a freeway underpass. He had to find a more comfortable position, so he rolled over onto his back, which turned out to be a great improvement. Then he closed his eyes and tried to get back to sleep.

But Gary couldn't sleep. He had a strange, uncomfortable feeling, a feeling that had nothing to do with physical discomfort, but a vague feeling deep inside that there was something wrong. He didn't know what the feeling was or what it was all about, whether there really was something wrong or whether he'd just had a bad dream, but whatever it was and whatever its cause, it wouldn't let him go back to sleep.

After lying awake for some time, feeling this strange feeling, it became clear that he wasn't going to get any more sleep that morning, and so he decided that he may as well get up and get moving. He unzipped his sleeping bag and sat up to take a look down the ledge and see if his partner George was still asleep or not. But when he looked, all he saw was an empty ledge—no George and no sign of George, not even his sleeping bag. And the sight of that empty concrete sent a shock through Gary's body, a shock of recognition that there really was something wrong. He quickly turned and looked along the ledge in the other direction, but there was no sign of George there either.

Gary tried to reassure himself. He told himself that there must be some good explanation for George's disappearance, and he began trying to think of what that explanation could be. But the only thing he could think of was that George had gotten up early and gone somewhere, to go to the bathroom or something, which was a good explanation for why he'd disappeared, though it didn't explain why his gear had disappeared, too. Then the thought came to him that George must have stashed his gear on one of the freeway support-beams. And no sooner had Gary thought it than he was up, half-walking-half-crawling along the low overhead ledge, looking for George's gear on the beams. But his search yielded nothing. George was gone without a trace.

This was strange, too strange to be true, and Gary continued to reassure himself that there had to be some explanation. After all, people don't just vanish into thin air, and they don't just disappear overnight, especially not someone like George, someone he'd known all his life. No, not George. Not after all this time together. Not after having gone everywhere and done everything together since... since... forever! No, it just couldn't be.

Gary continued trying to come up with an explanation for George's disappearance, and he soon hit upon a possibility. Quickly he put on his boots and, walking along the concrete slope below his ledge, he went out past the edge of the freeway and then up the grassy hillside until he stood just off the shoulder of the freeway. He looked up and down the road, thinking he'd find George there trying to hitch a ride for the two of them, but as far as he could see in both directions, there was no sign of his friend.

From this vantage point, Gary could see a good distance in all directions, so he looked around to see if there was somewhere George might have gone, but there wasn't much to see: a town way off in the distance and nothing closer except countryside and roads and a few scattered houses and a single gas-station at the foot of one of the off-ramps. He decided that his partner had to be there at the gas-station, so he walked back down the hillside, all the way down to the crossroad, and then he walked along the road to the gas-station.

There seemed to be no one at the station—no customers and no attendant anywhere in sight—and as Gary approached, he saw the “closed” sign on the door. He walked right up to the door and read the schedule of business hours, which stated that it wouldn't be open until eight o'clock that morning. He tried the door and called out George's name several times, but the door was locked and there was no answer to his calls, so he began to walk around the small building, searching for signs of his friend and calling out his name time after time. But these calls, too, went unanswered. He tried the door to the men's room, which proved to be locked, and then the door to the ladies' room, which opened when he turned the knob.

Gary went inside and, after using the toilet, he went to the sink to wash up. He took off his shirt and t-shirt and doused his upper body with water. He tried to get soap from the soap-dispenser—empty—then splashed more water on himself and finally began drying off with paper towels. During all this time, while sitting on the toilet and while washing himself, Gary hadn't stopped thinking about George and where he might have gone and where to look for him. But all this thought had gotten him nowhere. He hadn't the slightest idea of where George had gone or why he'd gone without saying anything. No, the only conclusion he could reach was that George had gone somewhere to do something and that he'd be back whenever he finished, which meant that the only thing Gary could do was to go back to the underpass and wait for him. It wasn't much of an alternative, but what else could he do?

Gary put his shirt back on and “combed” his hair, running his fingers through his long, scraggly brown hair several times. Then he looked at himself in the mirror, looked directly into his penetrating blue eyes, and asked himself point-blank: What the hell's going on around here? Is this a bad dream or a re-flash or what? How could George just disappear like this after all we've been through together? George, my friend, my partner, my brother, my double!

Gary asked these questions of the blue eyes in the mirror, but the eyes merely stared back, offering him no answers. He stared and thought and repeated his questions over and over again, but still the eyes told him nothing, nothing conclusive, nothing he wanted to hear, though they did make one thing perfectly clear to him. This wasn't a dream. It was really happening. Because those blue eyes weren't part of a dream. They were real, they were solid. Dream-eyes were like those brown eyes, those brown eyes flashing at him for a moment and then looking away, those brown eyes flashing at him and speaking to him, saying something strange and almost unintelligible. What was it they were saying? Something about George. They were saying that George hadn't disappeared. But how could that be? Of course he's disappeared. He's not here, is he? The brown eyes insisted: He's not here and he hasn't disappeared.—But how can that be?—He doesn't exist; he's never existed.

Gary jerked his eyes away from the mirror and down to the sink, splashed cold water on his face several times and walked outside with water dripping from his thin, twenty-year-old's

beard. What a crazy thought, he told himself. George never existed? Of course he exists! Of course he does!!

He walked quickly and distractedly back toward the underpass, his thoughts absorbed in his argument with the brown eyes in the mirror. He asked the eyes: Who do you think you are, saying that George doesn't exist? You're nothing but a goddamn hallucination yourself.

What was he doing, arguing with a hallucination? he asked himself. He must be flipping out. Arguing with hallucinations, that's really crazy. But somehow those eyes didn't seem like a hallucination. It wasn't that they had really been there in that mirror, though, but rather that they hadn't come from his imagination. No, it seemed like they had come from somewhere else, from... from his memory, that was it! He hadn't been seeing the eyes in the mirror, he had been remembering them. But remembering them from where? That was the question.

Gary suddenly awoke from his internal argument to realize that he'd walked right past the concrete slope leading up to his ledge, clear past the entire underpass. So he turned and walked back under the underpass, climbing the slope at an angle until he arrived at the spot where he'd left his unrolled sleeping bag. And once there, he looked along the ledge one more time but still found no sign of George. He rolled up his sleeping bag and stuffed it into the lower compartment of his back-pack, then he put the coat he'd used as a pillow into the upper compartment of the pack and closed the flap. And with all his gear now being packed, and with him having nothing to do but wait for George to return, he sat down on the back-pack and waited.

Gary waited and waited, and while he waited, he thought about George. Traffic on the freeway just above his head increased dramatically from the trickle there had been at dawn, and an occasional car passed along the crossroad under the underpass, but he hardly noticed them go by. Even the trucks rumbling loudly past a few feet above him made no impression upon him, so lost was he in his thoughts, in his memories.

He was remembering all the years he and George had known each other, all the things they had done together. He was remembering when they were kids growing up together, playing and going to school and getting into trouble together. He was remembering them playing on the football team and going to dances and chasing the girls together. Why, they'd even lost their cherries together, with a girl at school who thought that one guy at a time just wasn't enough. And then after school, they'd gotten jobs at the lumber yard together. And later, they'd gone out onto the road together, bumming around the country and picking up jobs when they had to, sharing the highs and the lows, the fat times and the thin times—the Experiences—of life on the road.

Together. They'd done it all together, ever since they were kids. Many people had thought they were brothers, but they were much closer than brothers, closer even than twins. They were more identical than identical twins, though not in the sense of one looking or acting just like the other, but rather in the sense of their being each others' perfect complements. Each one of them complemented and completed the other, while either of them alone was little more than half a person.

And now Gary's other half, Gary's double, was gone without a trace!!

Gary sat on his back-pack, thinking about George and their life together. He sat for a long time, for hours, or at least for what seemed like hours, and still George didn't return. Traffic was heavy on the freeway just above his head, with cars and trucks passing one after the other, but the noise of their passing made no impression on him, neither the high, rapid swishing of the car tires nor the earth-shaking rumble of the fully loaded eighteen-wheelers. On a couple of occasions, however, his attention had been attracted to a low, indistinct sound coming from somewhere not too far away. Then once again, his attention was drawn to that sound, somewhat louder now than before, and listening he could hear it clearly enough to make out what it was: a human voice coming from another part of the underpass... coming from the ledge diagonally across from where he was sitting.

Quickly, he was on his feet and jogging down the concrete slope. He crossed the road diagonally from his slope below the west-bound lanes and began to climb the slope below the east-bound lanes on the other side. He could hear the voices distinctly now, and after he had climbed a short distance, he caught sight of the people who belonged to the voices.

"Howdy," he said as he approached, "how's it goin'?"

"Hey, hello there," replied one of his fellow travelers, a husky young man with dirty blond hair and a big smile. He had the look of someone who came up the hard way, though he didn't look hardened. His companion, a heavy woman with stringy brown hair, smiled as well.

Gary stopped partway down the slope, far enough down to where he could stand up straight below the freeway support-beams. He was about to say something else when the man spoke, "Come on in and make yourself comfortable. Come on into our house."

"Don't mind if I do," said Gary as he climbed the rest of the way up the slope and sat down on the ledge beside the road-dirty man. "Hell of a nice place you got here. Real cozy... How much you pay for it?"

"Not a goddamn thing," the man answered, and he laughed at his own joke.

"That's what I pay for mine over there on the other side," said Gary laughing and pointing toward his own ledge.

The man reached down beside him and picked up a half-gallon jug of cheap white port wine. He held up the bottle, offering it to Gary, and said, "Would you like some tea?"

"Nah, no thanks. It's a little early in the mornin' for me."

"Early? The sun's up, ain't it?" and he took a long hit from the jug.

The woman spoke up as he drank, "Where you goin'?"

"West... on out to California."

"We're goin' east. Comin' from Houston an' goin' to Florida or someplace."

“Oh yeah, that’s where I’m comin’ from, Florida,” said Gary

“Yeah, we’re goin’ out to get some a that Florida sunshine,” said the man. “We was in Houston damn near two weeks. Started getting’ restless. Gotta get a little change a scenery.”

“Two weeks is a long time to spend in one place, all right,” Gary agreed.

“Too damn long,” the man said. “Only place I ever been for longer’n that was jail.” And he laughed again.

“What’d you stay there so long for? Cause you liked the food?”

“Yeah, yeah,” the man laughed, and the woman laughed gently beside him.

“Liked the company, too, I s’pose?” After the laughter had died down, Gary continued by asking, “Did you folks get caught out in that storm last night?”

The woman answered, “Yeah, we come under here to keep dry. It sure did rain...”

“Damn right it rained,” the man broke in. “Damn right. Rain an’ thunder an’ lightning... It was a helluva storm, a helluva storm.”

“Yeah,” said Gary, “I wouldn’ta wanted to get caught out in it, out there without any shelter.”

“Like this poor guy here was,” said the woman indicating a pile of blankets that Gary hadn’t paid any attention to before. Now that he looked at it, though, he could see that the pile had a distinctly human form.

“What, is there somebody under there?” Gary asked with rising interest.

“Yeah,” answered the woman, “it’s some poor guy who come wanderin’ in here in the middle of the night, soakin’ wet an’ lost an’ all mixed up...”

The man broke in again, “That guy didn’t know where he was or who he was or what he was. He was just wanderin’ around like he didn’t know what was goin’ on an’ shakin’ with the chills an’ mumblin’ stuff...”

“What kinda stuff?”

“Only thing we could make out, he says he’s goin’ west,” the woman answered.

Gary felt a great wave of expectation rise up inside him as he immediately drew the conclusion that the stranger under the blankets had to be George. He asked quickly, excitedly, “What does the guy look like? Does he look something like me? Skinny, long brown hair?”

“No, he’s nothin’ like you,” the woman answered. “He’s got short hair and no beard, and he ain’t skinny. He’s kinda fat, even.”

And just as quickly as his expectations had risen, Gary now felt them come crashing down into a bitter disappointment. He felt deflated, completely deflated, and far too depressed to do or say anything, so there was a silence until the woman spoke again, "Are you lookin' for someone?"

"Yeah, a friend of mine." It took a great effort just to get the words out.

"What happened to him?"

"I don't know, he's just gone. Last night he was here, and now he's gone."

"Is your money gone, too?" the man asked with a slight laugh.

"No, it's nothin' like that. He's an old friend, a really old friend. He wouldn'ta just run out on me. Something musta happened to him. It had to."

Neither of them knew what to say next. The man was beginning to see that this wasn't a joke and that, rather than making another humorous remark, it would be a good time to take a hit from his wine jug. The woman finally decided to break the silence, speaking hesitantly, "Are you sure...?"

"Oh, he's gone all right. Last night he was here, under this freeway with me, and now this morning he's gone, completely gone." He hesitated a moment before adding, "I just can't figure out why he left. We didn't have a fight or anything. Nothing!... He's just gone."

Gary shook his head in disbelief as he contemplated the situation. The woman, noting the depth of his feelings and hearing the emotion in his voice, tried without success to think of something she could say or do to comfort him. The man, feeling his spirits in need of further lifting, took yet another hit from his wine jug.

Finally, Gary spoke again, "George was my best friend. He was the best friend anybody ever had... Really, he was more than a friend, more than a brother even... He was like a part of me." Gary wasn't so much speaking to his recent acquaintances as he was thinking out loud. "George always helped me with everything. He was always there. He was always helpin' me, always tellin' me things... He was always tellin' me if something was right or wrong. He was a lot clearer on those things than me. He could always say right off whether something was right or wrong... right off with no hesitation... He was always tellin' me things like that, and he was always with me, goin' everywhere and doin' everything... A lotta people thought we were brothers, but it was more than that, a lot more... We were closer than brothers... We were closer than anybody... Sometimes I wasn't sure if he wasn't really me, a part of me, that I wasn't a split-personality with him as the other half..."

Gary was beginning to feel somewhat better now, as though by speaking about George, he had let off some of the pressure that had been building up inside him all morning. He paused and looked up, but when he did, the man quickly looked away, and the woman stared for a moment before she, too, averted her eyes. They shifted about uncomfortably, and Gary could see that he'd gone too far in his talk about George. Why, they must think he was crazy, a raving madman talking about the other half of his split-personality! He had to lighten up, to say

something that would reassure them and put them at ease. “Ah, what the hell. The asshole prob’ly just decided he didn’t want to go to California after all, and he ran out on me.”

“Yeah, that could be,” the woman agreed.

“Hell, I remember one time in Oregon...” And the conversation revived somewhat, with the three of them talking about the places they’d been and the people they’d known and the things they’d done, though now they spoke in a somewhat stiff, guarded manner, not with the easy-going air that had existed among them at the beginning. There seemed to remain a certain doubt about whether Gary was going to flip-out again at any moment. After awhile, Gary decided that it would be best to put an end to the awkward relationship, and so he wished the pair luck with their hitching and returned to his own ledge.

When he arrived at the ledge, there was still no sign of George. Gary sat for a couple of minutes but soon decided that it was a waste of time to wait any longer. George was gone and he wasn’t coming back, and that’s all there was to it! No, it was no use waiting any longer. The only thing to do was to try to get a ride and to forget about George, to go out and live his own life—alone, without George.

He grabbed his pack and carried it out past the edge of the underpass and up to the freeway where he set it down just on the edge of the shoulder. Then he moved a bit further onto the shoulder, a bit closer to the freeway itself, and stuck out his thumb. He did this automatically, as though he was walking in his sleep, and as he stood hitchhiking and watching the cars go by, he had a strange feeling that the things he was doing and seeing weren’t quite real. The freeway, the cars and trucks, even he himself seemed somehow unreal and insubstantial, like figures in a dream, like mere appearances with no solidity. This was the first time he had ever hitchhiked without George, or in fact done anything at all without George, and the void created by George’s absence seemed to be more than a mere void of companionship. It almost seemed to be a void of the underlying and unifying principles of reality. He felt like everything that had happened today since George’s disappearance had been nothing but a dream, an illusion. Like nothing that had happened today had been real in any normal sense of the word—and yet it had all happened. It had all been so very, very real.

Gary stood hitchhiking in a dream-like state, holding out his phantom thumb and watching the mirage-like cars pass by, and he only roused himself from this state when a car finally stopped to pick him up. The light grey Chevy stopped several yards past where Gary had been standing, and as he hurried toward the car, he felt a strong sensation of *déjà vu*: He had seen this car before. He had done this before. When he arrived alongside the car, he bent down to speak to the driver through the passenger-side window, and upon looking into the driver’s brown eyes, the feeling of familiarity, of recognition, rose to an even higher pitch within him. He had seen this car before, and he had seen those eyes before. He had done all this before. And the feeling was so strong that he felt as though he wasn’t doing or saying anything at all, as though he was merely remembering, as though he was watching himself act and speak.

“I’m goin’ as far as Austin, if that’ll do ya any good,” said the driver.

“That sounds great. That’s a good chunk of the way to California,” said Gary. Then after a slight pause, he added, “Say, there’s another guy sleepin’ down under this underpass who’s goin’ west. Could you give him a ride, too?”

The driver’s brown eyes flickered with doubt for a moment before he finally said, “Okay, go tell him he’s got a ride.”

Gary ran down the grassy hillside and down the concrete slope, then across the road and up the slope to where his fellow travelers were. They were still sitting exactly where he’d left them with the only difference being that now there was much less wine left in the man’s jug than there had been when Gary had left.

Gary called out to them hurriedly as he approached, “Hey there, I got a ride goin’ west, clear to Austin. Wake up that guy in the blanket and tell him he’s got a ride!”

The woman shook the sleeping man vigorously and pulled the blanket from over his head and told him repeatedly to wake up. After some hesitation, he sat up and looked about with dazed, vacant eyes, trying to figure out where he was and what was happening. And as soon as Gary saw him, he cried out, “George, it’s you! I knew you had to be around here somewhere. I knew you wouldn’t run out on me!”

The man turned his head and gave Gary a blank stare, giving no indication whatsoever that he recognized the person who had just spoken to him. He looked nothing like George—he was a heavy-set young man with short black hair, just as the woman had described him—but Gary was sure from the first moment he saw him that this was his friend. What the guy looked like had nothing to do with who he really was!

“Jeez, what happened to you, bro? I was worried sick about you. Where’d you go last night? How’d you get over here?”

George just stared back without answering, giving Gary a bewildered, uncomprehending look and having no idea of what he was talking about.

“Come on, bro, I got us a ride. The guy’s waitin’ for us up there. Let’s get goin’ and you can explain things later. Come on, let’s go!”

But it was only after Gary had grabbed his arm and helped him up that George finally got to his feet and went with him down the slope. And as they left, Gary shouted goodbye and thanks to the couple, who sat on their ledge and watched as the pair of loonies walked down the slope and across the road, then up the slope on the other side below the west-bound lanes before disappearing in the direction of the freeway.

George got into the back seat of the car, and he soon stretched out and went back to sleep without ever having given any indication that he knew who Gary was or what he was talking about. Meanwhile, Gary sat in the front seat and maintained a typical hitchhiker’s conversation with the driver, telling him where he was going and where he was coming from and his hometown and the type of work he did and so on. He spoke without thought and without effort, without truly involving himself in the conversation. After all, he had already held this

conversation before. Everything that was happening had already happened before. So all he was really doing was watching the events as they repeated themselves.

After awhile, with all the standard subjects exhausted, the two of them lapsed into silence. Gary sat looking through the windshield at the freeway rapidly disappearing beneath the car, only occasionally turning to look at the countryside through the side window. Soon he lost interest in the scenery altogether, and he sat staring at the road ahead, staring at the painted lines shooting rapidly toward the car and at the sign-posts growing gradually larger and then whipping past in an instant. He stared at the hypnotic motion of the freeway and forgot about the driver sitting beside him, forgot about the car surrounding him, even forgot about George in the backseat. He forgot everything and did nothing, just sat and stared straight ahead at the freeway.

Suddenly hearing the driver speak, he turned to look at him. But when he looked, he didn't see the driver at all. What he saw was the eyes, the brown eyes flashing at him for a moment and then looking away, flashing at him and speaking to him, saying something strange and almost unintelligible. Gary listened to the eyes, and soon he began to make out what they were saying. They were talking about George and about the guy in the backseat, saying that he wasn't George—that his name was Bob. No, that wasn't George and it couldn't be George since George didn't exist.

Gary listened now without arguing. He wanted to hear what else the eyes had to say. He wanted to hear their explanation for what had happened today. The eyes continued, saying that George was nothing but an illusion, an illusion that he had out-grown and had finally left behind.

—An illusion? What are you talking about?

I mean that he's an illusionary self of yours, the most illusionary of all your many selves.

—My many selves? What's that supposed to mean?

The brown eyes expanded upon their explanation: I'm talking about all the many selves that are contained within you, the many selves that comprise you. Because after all, you're not just that piece of meat walking around. You also have selves that are male and that are white, selves that are of a certain age and come from a certain family in a certain town and a certain country, and selves that have a certain personal history. Selves that have seen and done various things, and selves that have known and been influenced by various people. And it's all these many selves together that make up you.

—And you say that George was one of those selves?

He was a kind of add-on self, one who almost seemed to exist outside of you.

—But he did live outside me, didn't he?

No, that was all a part of the illusion. He was the guy who always told you right from wrong, wasn't he? The guy who said things that made you feel proud or guilty. Isn't that right?

—Yeah, that's right...

Well, he's gone now. The illusion is finally gone. You've finally been able to leave him behind.

—But why now? Why today? I haven't done anything special.

You don't shed these illusionary selves through a single act or even through a whole series of acts. You overcome them through a long, slow process of awakening to a new awareness. You overcome them through the development of a universal-self, a self that embraces anything and everything, a self that eliminates the category of other by absorbing the other within the self. And once you manage to reach a certain point in the development of this universal-self, you begin to act from true compassion, you act in the self-interest of a self that includes the entire universe.

—And you're saying that I've reached that level?

No, not entirely. But for some time now, you've been far enough along to where George had become a useless appendage. He'd long ceased to perform any useful function, and now he's atrophied to the point where he's finally vanished into thin air.

—But that can't be true. He still used to talk to me all the time. He still used to tell me stuff.

Yes, but only after you'd already gone ahead and done the right thing anyway. Why, you didn't need him to tell you whether or not you should try to get Bob a ride, did you? You just knew it was the right thing to do. You knew that Bob needed help and so you helped him without ever stopping to think about it. Your act was automatic and unconscious, and in that way, it was an act of true compassion.

—True compassion, huh? Well, I don't know...

Gary turned his eyes back toward the road and sat there for some time, thinking about what the brown eyes had just told him. When he turned to speak to the eyes once again, though, he no longer saw them as he had before. Instead, he saw all of the driver sitting there beside him, not just the eyes but the whole face and body. He turned around and looked at the sleeping stranger in the backseat, at the man he no longer knew, and he watched and contemplated the man as he slept. He contemplated this man who had entered his life at the very moment he'd left it, this man who seemed to have died and been reborn right before his eyes. Or was it Gary himself who had just been reborn? And was this man's presence at this time and in this place anything more than pure happenstance? Or then again, was there anything at all that had just happened? Was any of it real in any way?

Finally, Gary turned back toward the driver and, in the first act of his life, he reopened the conversation. "I don't know what happened to Bob here last night, but he sure is a mess."

"Bob? I thought you said his name was George."

"No, it's Bob. His name's Bob..."

THE MID-WATCH

Gary stood leaning against the windbreaker on the starboard wing of the ship's bridge, feeling the warm tropical air blow against his face. As he had been doing for some time now, he watched the quarter-moon as it slowly descended toward the horizon out ahead, getting very low now. He occasionally glanced around at the stars overhead or looked along the moonlit horizon on either side to see if any other ships were around. His view to port was blocked in many places by the ship's booms and king-posts, but he didn't change his position to see around those obstructions. After all, they were in such a little-used traffic lane that it had been several days now since they'd seen another ship, and besides, the lookout on the bow had an unobstructed view. No, there was no good reason to move, and so he continued to lean there where he was and to watch the moon.

After awhile, he decided it was time for a change and walked into the small, old-fashioned wheelhouse, and cutting between the three-centimeter radar and the engine order telegraph, he passed behind the steering stands and through the door leading to the chartroom. There he looked at the video read-out on the satellite navigator and saw that it would still be another hour or so before the next satellite pass, which meant that there was nothing for him to do in here at the moment. Still hoping to kill a few moments of this long, slow watch, he looked down at the plotting sheet but found nothing of interest there either. So deciding that he may as well return to the tropical night and the moon, he stepped out the side door of the chartroom, out onto the port wing.

He leaned against the windbreaker once again and returned to watching the moon, which was just beginning to touch the horizon, and he continued to watch it as it slowly disappeared behind the sea. Once the moon was completely gone, he turned in the now dark night and went back into the wheelhouse, thinking that he'd start up a conversation with Kelly, the seaman standing watch with him. But when he entered, he found that Kelly wasn't in the wheelhouse, and continuing out onto the starboard wing, he found that his watch-partner wasn't there either. Figuring that Kelly must have stepped into the head, Gary began to pace from wing to wing, passing through the wheelhouse on each lap and occasionally glancing in the direction of the head as he went by.

When after some time Kelly still hadn't emerged from the head, Gary began to get worried, and he finally decided to check up on the guy. He went over and knocked on the door and asked if anything was wrong, and receiving no answer, he opened the door and stuck his head inside only to find that the tiny room was unoccupied. This came as quite a surprise, and he began to ask himself where Kelly could have gone if he wasn't on the bridge or in the head. After all, Kelly was a good seaman, not at all the type to leave the bridge without permission, so he must be around here somewhere.

Gary suddenly thought that perhaps he'd gone up to the flying-bridge, and no sooner had he thought it than he began walking out onto the wing and up the ladder. But a quick search failed to locate his watch-partner and, thinking of other possibilities, he walked over to the after railing of the flying-bridge and looked down onto number five hatch and the deck alongside it. Then continuing his search in the same direction, he walked back down the ladder onto the port

wing where he looked aft, past number five hatch to the deck outside the after house and also up on the boat-deck above it. But he saw no sign of Kelly. He crossed over to the starboard wing and repeated the visual search, but once again he found nothing. So where else could the guy possibly be? The only other place Gary could think of was the sea-cabin, but his search there proved fruitless. And when he looked inside the radio room just for good measure, he also came up empty-handed.

It was clear now that Kelly had left the bridge, but it seemed inconceivable that he would simply have gone down to his room without saying anything. Kelly just wasn't that type. So maybe he'd fallen overboard! The thought struck Gary sharply, but then he asked himself: how could he on a night like tonight with the seas so calm and the ship hardly rolling at all? No, he couldn't have fallen overboard—though he certainly could have jumped!

Gary had to find him, and he had to do it soon, and so he went over to the P.A. system and, making sure that it was set for the crew mess room and that the volume was turned up high enough, he called out for the standby man to phone the bridge. When the man failed to respond, he called a second and a third time only to have these calls, too, go unanswered, at which point he began to curse that goddamned useless ordinary. The guy must have gone to his room where Gary couldn't reach him from the bridge when he should be standing-by in the mess room.

No, the only way he'd be able to check on Kelly would be to call the lookout on the bow and send him back to look for him. So Gary cranked the handle on the sound-powered phone and waited for the lookout to answer, and when there was no reply, he cranked again and again, longer and faster each time. He tried calling over the P.A. system, but all he heard in the talk-back speaker was the sound of wind. He went out onto the wing and waved his flashlight toward the bow and even tried yelling, but there was just no way to get the lookout's attention. Or maybe the lookout wasn't even there. Maybe he'd gone to his room, too, or jumped over the side or gone somewhere to do something.

The situation was getting serious, and Gary soon decided that he should call the captain, wake him up and let him know what was happening and get him to help locate the missing men. He set the sound-powered phone to the captain's number and cranked the handle, but just as in the cases of the standby and the lookout, the captain didn't answer his call. Not even when Gary tried the P.A. system on the all-speakers mode. Yes, this situation was getting serious, very serious!

He tried the chief mate's number and then switched over to the engineer-circuit phone and tried calling the engine-room only to have these calls, too, go unanswered. Then he thought about the radio operator whose cabin was located just behind the bridge, next to the radio room. That's what he'd do, he'd get sparks to help him locate the captain since the phone and P.A. systems didn't seem to be working—or at least that was what he told himself was wrong, that that was the only reason no one would answer his calls. But when he opened the door and looked inside, he saw that sparks wasn't there. And when he turned on the overhead lights, the sight that met his eyes sent a shock-wave through his body. Because not only was sparks gone, but even his clothes and his books and everything else were gone. The room was completely empty!

This thing was really getting out of control, and as Gary wandered blindly back into the wheelhouse, completely lost in his thoughts, he had no idea what he should do next. Should he try calling again? Should he leave the bridge and try to find someone—anyone—down below? But what if he did that and found nothing but empty rooms? Then he'd be completely lost!

Hey, come on, he had to get a hold of himself. He had to think this thing through coolly and rationally. He couldn't let this... Suddenly there was a loud ringing sound, and he asked himself what it could be, where it could be coming from. He'd never heard that sound on the bridge before. The ringing sounded again, and this time it seemed oddly familiar. It seemed like something he'd heard before in some other place... in some other place...

With the next ring, Gary was on his feet and picking up the receiver. "It's three-twenty, mate," said the voice on the other end of the phone line.

"Okay, thanks," said Gary and hung up the phone. Whew, what a relief! So it had all been nothing but a dream, nothing but a goddamn dream. None of it had been real. No one had disappeared and Gary hadn't suddenly found himself alone on the ship, impotently searching for his lost shipmates.

There must be some sort of Freudian significance in all this, he thought, though he had no idea of what it might be. But it must mean something, this dream about being abandoned by the entire human race, about being left completely alone in the world and unable to make any sort of human contact at all. Yes, it had to mean something, and one of these days he'd have to ask someone who knew about these things.

Calm now and wide awake, he told himself that he'd be able to think over the implications of that dream during his watch and that what he had to do right now was to turn on the lights and get dressed. But suddenly, he felt his tranquility broken. He felt a shock-wave pass through his body just like the one he'd felt when he'd seen sparks' empty room, as he suddenly realized that he had no idea of where the light switch was. And in fact, he had no idea of where he was: there was no telephone in his room, and he wasn't on the four-to-eight watch. He was on the twelve-to-four.

He groped around the room until he found the light switch, and when the lights came on, they lit up a room he'd never seen before. Because rather than his small room on the old Gulf Pacer he was working on, a room not much bigger than a broom closet, what he saw was a big, modern room with an extra-large bed and an easy chair and a refrigerator and a telephone on the desk. And all of it new, all of it strange, all of it being seen by him for the first time.

Now things were really getting serious. Now his dream was getting seriously out of control. So what he had to do was to wake up for real, to get back to the Pacer—but with the rest of the crew still aboard. He tried pinching himself and slapping himself, hard, and he went into the large, clean head and splashed cold water onto his face, but it didn't do any good. Because when he looked around, he still saw this strange room, this apparition, this image from a dream.

When he realized that he wasn't going to be able to awaken himself from this bad dream—if in fact it was a dream—he decided that the only thing to do was to go with it, to try to work his way through the dream. And so he got dressed and set out on his way to the bridge.

He opened the door and looked up and down the passageway outside. To the right, he saw a door that looked like it led to an exterior stairway, while on the left the passageway went a short distance and then turned to the right. He decided to go left and followed the passageway around the corner, walking past a door on his left labeled CHIEF MATE and past a cleaning gear locker on his right, until he came to another door on his right labeled STAIRWAY. This was what he was looking for, the stairway to the bridge, and he unhesitatingly opened the door and began to climb the stairs. He went up two flights, passing what had to be the captain's deck, and arrived at a door at the top of the staircase. He tried to turn the knob on the door but found that it was locked. So what was this? he asked himself. Who ever heard of locking the door to the bridge while a ship is at sea? He knocked loudly on the door, knocked several times and even tried yelling, but he received no answer and the door remained closed.

Well, what could he do now? Here he was on a ship he'd never seen before, at the top of the stairway to the bridge and confronted with a locked door. Obviously, the only thing to do was to go back downstairs and try to find another way to the bridge. He went down one flight of stairs but found that the door there was locked, too, so he went down another flight of stairs to the mates' deck and tried to turn the knob on the door he'd come in earlier. But to his amazement, he found that door to be locked, just like the two doors above.

What the hell was going on here? This dream kept going from bad to worse. Because now here he was locked inside the stairway! What could he do now? How could he get out? He had to keep going downstairs, that was the only answer. He had to keep going down and hope he'd find an unlocked door.

The doors to the next two decks below also proved to be locked, but when he went down one more flight, to the very bottom of the staircase, he finally found a door that opened. And with great relief at being released from his vertical prison, Gary stepped out into a passageway and looked around to get his bearings and to decide upon his next course of action. A short distance to the right and on the opposite side of the passageway from the door he'd just come out, he saw an open door and, instinctively, he began to walk toward it.

He stepped inside the door, into a large, clean, comfortable crew mess, and looking around, he saw the very sight that he had been longing so hard to see: he saw another human being! Because sitting there at one of the tables and drinking a cup of coffee was a seaman, one Gary had never seen before though one who looked just like dozens of seamen Gary had sailed with over the years. The man must have been about sixty years old, a bit overweight, and wearing work-clothes and a black-gang cap. When he saw Gary, he grinned widely, and in doing so, he showed off his one truly memorable feature: his teeth. He had no upper teeth on the right side while those on the left side stuck out at all sorts of odd angles. And when those badly deformed teeth shone out of his already not very intelligent face, it made him look like a complete idiot. Gary would have found the guy comical if only he hadn't been so happy and so relieved at finally finding someone else in this nightmare of his, someone he could talk to and ask the questions that were on his mind. Like where was he and what the hell was going on?

But before Gary could open his mouth and ask his questions, the seaman spoke to him, saying, "Hello, Gary, how are you this morning?"

“What?... How do you know my name?” Gary asked, confused.

“Why shouldn’t I know it?” the grinning stranger replied calmly.

“Because you’ve never seen me before... or at least I’ve never seen you before... or...”

“You mean you don’t remember me?”

“No, I don’t. I don’t remember you and I don’t remember this ship, and the only thing I know is that I want to get out of here and back to the ship I was on. Now!” Gary could hardly contain his emotions.

“You mean this isn’t the ship you were on?”

“No, it’s not. I was on the... the... I was on another ship.”

“And you can’t remember the name of it?”

“Of course I can remember the name. I just can’t think of it right now. But I remember it. I remember it!” But the truth of the matter was that he couldn’t remember it. In fact, he was beginning to forget everything about that ship and the people on it. He tried to remember but it was fading fast, just like the memory of a dream fades soon after awakening.

“Then what type of ship was it?” the seaman continued calmly, the grin still on his face.

“I don’t know. I can’t remember.” Gary was beginning to lose patience at being questioned by this ridiculous old man with the stupid grin. “What difference does it make to you, anyway? Who do you think you are to go asking me all these questions?”

“You mean you don’t know who I am?”

“No, I don’t. I already told you that. I don’t know who the fuck you are! Now stop answering my questions with questions.”

“Does it bother you?”

“Damn right it bothers me! Now stop asking questions and start answering some.” Gary’s patience was coming to an end.

“What do you want to know?”

“Who are you and what’s the name of this ship?”

“You mean you really don’t know?”

“No, I don’t!” Gary exploded. “I’ve been trying to tell you that! I don’t know who you are and I don’t know where I am and I just want a straight answer.”

“Oh, an answer? You want an answer from me?”

“Yes, you senile fuckin’ brainless... I want an answer! I want to know who you are.”

“Oh, so you really don’t know?”

“No! No, I don’t!!” Gary yelled, but the seaman didn’t react to his cries. He just sat there grinning stupidly, completely unmoved by the fury that was being directed at him. Gary clenched and unclenched his fists, fighting an urge to take a swing at the guy and telling himself that he would gain just as much by banging his head against the wall. This guy was just too stupid.

After he had calmed down some, Gary tried taking a new tack. “Who else is there on this ship besides you and me?”

“Who else?”

“Yeah, who else?... Who are the other seamen?”

“Other seamen?”

“Yeah, other seamen. There must be other seamen aboard this ship. Just tell me who they are or where they are. Just tell me something about them.”

“Are there other seamen?”

“Of course. There have to be. This ship can’t run itself.”

“It can’t?”

Gary could feel his fists clenching once again as he fought the urge to bury them in that brainless, grinning face. Maybe he should forget about this guy and try to find his way to the bridge, but the very thought of finding himself locked inside that stairway again sent a shudder through his body. No, as frustrating as it was to talk to this guy, it was still better than wandering around lost. The only thing to do was to keep talking, to keep trying to get some kind of information out of this grinning moron. “What’s the name of this ship?”

“You mean you don’t know?”

Oh god, here we go again. “Okay then, just tell me where we’re going. What’s our next port?”

“You don’t know? You the second mate?”

“No, I don’t know!” Gary took a couple of deep breaths to regain his composure and then spoke his thoughts out loud, “I can’t believe it. Here I am on a ship I’ve never seen before and the only person I can find to talk to is a goddamn vegetable. This can’t be real, it just can’t be.”

“Real? What do you mean real?” asked the seaman with the eternal stupid grin.

“What do I mean real? I mean real, that’s all. Real.”

“And what does that mean?”

What was this? Was this imbecile trying to get him into a philosophical discussion on the meaning of reality? That’s really too much! But then on second thought, what the hell! What else did he have to do? Go wandering around the ship some more? No, he could just as well play around with this fool for awhile. He could show off the fruits of his occasional philosophical musings while he waited to awaken from this nightmare. “When I say real, I mean something that’s substantial, something that’s part of the real, substantial world.”

“And what’s that?”

“Why, it’s the world in which we live, the real, solid world that surrounds us.”

“But how do you know it’s real?” persisted the grinning seaman.

“How do I know? Quite simply because I see it and I live in it, and because I know that I’m real. I know beyond any reasonable doubt that I exist, and of course a real person couldn’t possibly live in an unreal, insubstantial world.”

“And how do you know you’re real?”

“Because I think, therefore I am!” Gary pronounced it with an end-of-conversation finality.

“Please don’t make jokes with me. I asked you a serious question,” the seaman said firmly.

Gary was taken aback at the seaman’s sudden change in tone, and he stared at the stupidly grinning face for a moment before answering lamely, “I’m not making a joke, I’m serious... I think, therefore I am.”

“Before you repeat that silly phrase again, please consider what you’re actually saying. You’re saying, ‘I am because I think,’ aren’t you?”

“Yeah, that’s what I’m saying.”

“And it would be the same thing to say, ‘I am because I am thinking,’ wouldn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“So what does it prove to say, ‘I am because I am?’ That’s about the dumbest, most nonsensical phrase I’ve ever heard. I don’t even see how you could say it with a straight face. The phrase ‘I am because I am’ is so totally meaningless and redundant that any intelligent person should be able to see that it must be removed from your answer if it’s to have any meaning at all. But if you remove that phrase, you’re left with the single word ‘thinking,’ and though that word by itself may not sound very profound, it does get much closer to the bedrock truth that can be arrived at by the Cartesian method than your earlier statement does.”

Gary stared open-mouthed at the seaman, unable to believe that he'd actually heard what he'd just heard. How was it possible for anyone so stupid to have said what that guy just said? He stared into the face with the stupid grin and, though at this moment the grin didn't look quite as brainless as it had before, it was still too comical to be taken seriously. No, in spite of what this guy had just said, he was still an idiot. And while Gary knew that if he didn't answer the guy right now, he would be admitting defeat, admitting that he had just been out-argued by an idiot, the trouble was that Gary couldn't think of anything to say. He could hardly defend his earlier statement after having heard it so completely shot down, while at the same time, he drew a blank when he tried to come up with some new argument. This guy really had him rattled.

There was a prolonged silence as Gary struggled to find something to say, a silence that was finally broken by the grinning seaman. "So you don't know what the word real means?"

"I know. Of course, I know. I just don't feel like talking about it right now."

"And what do you feel like talking about?"

"I'll tell you what I want to talk about. I want to talk about who you are and what ship this is and what the hell's going on around here. That's what I want to talk about!" Gary's frustration could be heard in his voice.

"Why are you asking me what's happening when you know better than I do? I'm the one who should be asking you what's happening."

"I know what's happening? Me?! I don't have a fuckin' clue what's happening! That's how much I know. Nothing! Zero!"

"Oh yes, you do. You know exactly what's happening, or at least you should, because the answer is right in front of your eyes and all around you. All you have to do is to open your eyes and look around and you'll see it."

What was this guy talking about now? Gary knew what was happening and all he had to do was to open his eyes? All he had to do was to look around? The answer was right here?

Gary turned his head and looked around the mess room, trying to find the answer he so desperately longed for. He looked at the coffee-maker on the counter by the door to the pantry, and he looked at the clock on the bulkhead and at the cheap painting hanging nearby and at... His eyes were drawn back to the painting and to the figure portrayed in it, a figure that seemed somehow familiar. And when he looked more closely, he saw that the figure was indeed familiar. It was extremely familiar, in fact, as the painting was a portrait of Gary himself. He turned back toward the seaman to tell him what he'd seen and to ask him what it meant, but when he turned back, he didn't see the seaman with the stupid grin at all. What he saw sitting at the table in front of him was Gary himself!

Unable to believe his eyes, he blinked several times. But each time he reopened his eyes, he still saw himself sitting there grinning back at him. He tried turning and looking around the room once again, but everywhere he looked, in every direction, he saw portraits of himself. Looking around at those portraits and back to the grinning himself seated before him, he was

suddenly struck by a thunderbolt of insight as all at once, he understood what the grinning seaman had been telling him. He understood the truth that was before his eyes and all around him. "I see myself! That's the secret. That's the explanation. Everything and everywhere is myself. It's all a reflection of me!"

But even before he had finished speaking, the seaman had burst out into loud laughter. Gary looked down to see what he was laughing about, and when he looked, he no longer saw himself seated there, but rather he saw the seaman with the stupid grin laughing hysterically and banging on the table. Rapidly losing assurance over the validity of his insight, Gary looked back at the painting where he'd first seen his own portrait, and what he saw was no longer a portrait of himself at all. What he saw was a portrait of Kelly! He turned back to the grinning seaman, but when he did so, he now saw his own brother sitting there laughing. Getting desperate, he glanced around the room in all directions, but everywhere he looked, he saw portraits of different seamen he'd sailed with and different people he'd known over the years. And all the portraits were constantly changing, portraying different people each time he looked at them. Then when he looked back at the man seated before him, he no longer saw his brother as now it was Kelly who was sitting there grinning back at him.

Gary felt another sudden flash of insight, not quite as strong as the earlier one though somehow more authentic, and he put his insight into words. "I see change. I see changing appearances and structures and forms. I see everything constantly changing and fluctuating without any permanence."

But once again, even before he had finished speaking, the seaman before him burst out laughing. And when Gary looked down, he now saw the seaman with the stupid grin. And while he could hear the seaman laughing at him, he saw that the man wasn't moving. He was sitting there frozen like a statue, not moving a muscle or blinking an eye, though somehow hilarious laughter was pouring out of his mouth.

Gary stared at this eerie sight for a short time when he felt another flash of insight, weaker still than the previous one. "I see permanence, too. I see the permanence that underlies changing appearances. I see..."

Once again the seaman's laughter intensified, and this time when Gary looked down, he saw no one at all seated before him. The chair where the grinning seaman had been was now empty and the laughter echoed out of empty space. Gary looked in the direction of the painting where he'd first seen his portrait, but now he saw nothing but an empty frame. Feeling a bit unsteady, he put his hand to his head. But in doing so, he realized that he couldn't see his hand, and looking down at the rest of his body, he saw nothing at all. He was invisible!

Gary felt another flash of insight, this one the weakest yet, but still he put the insight into words. "I see nothingness. I see the nothingness that underlies the permanence that underlies changing appearances. Or at least I think that's what I see. I don't know..."

This time Gary's speech wasn't met with laughter, which came as a surprise to him. And when he looked down at the table before him, he saw the seaman sitting there grinning stupidly just as he had been before Gary had first begun looking around the room trying to find the

explanation that was supposed to be right before his eyes. The seaman spoke to him now, calmly and gently, “Are you finished or do you want to keep making a fool of yourself? Do you want to keep going along this line and coming up with ever more complex and ridiculous explanations of what you see, or have you had enough?”

Gary felt numb and unable to answer or to speak at all, so the grinning seaman continued, “If you want to be able to answer a question so simple and so basic as the question, ‘What do you see before your eyes?’ you have to abandon your system of binary logic. This type of logic is perfectly well adapted to solving the secondary questions in life, to solving those questions that are part of normal, daily human experience, but when it comes to the primary questions, it’s totally inadequate.

“If you try using this narrow system of logic to answer the big, basic questions of life, you’ll always arrive at some illogical or extra-logical conclusion. If you try to use it to answer the question of where the movement of the world began, as some early philosophers did, you’ll have to invent some extra-logical element, some ‘unmoved mover’ that has nothing to do with our actual human experience but is purely a product of our narrowly logical imaginations.”

Gary nodded dumbly in agreement with this statement. He wasn’t so sure that he agreed with, or even understood, what the grinning seaman was telling him, but he felt too tired and too drained to argue. After a pause, the seaman continued speaking, “Now tell me, without applying any logic to your answer, what do you see? What’s the most obvious thing you see?”

“I see you sitting there.”

“No, that’s not obvious enough.”

“I see this room and the table and...”

“No, no, there’s something much more obvious than that.”

More obvious? What could be more obvious than the things that were right in front of him? What else could possibly be more obvious? What else could he be seeing?... Seeing!! That’s what he was seeing! “Sight. I see sight!”

“Now you’re starting to move in the right direction. Now you’re seeing what’s obvious.”

“Yes, I see sight. Sight... and light. I see light moving. Moving and carrying images... And I see images that are nothing but light, nothing but light moving. And the light itself is nothing... nothing but movement...”

When he said this, an intensely bright light appeared before him, a light that had no definite size or shape or location in space, but one that obliterated all other objects of sight. The light was so bright that it hurt Gary’s eyes, making him close them for a moment, and when he reopened them, the light had disappeared. But Gary was too absorbed to pay any attention to this light or to the objects of normal sight that reappeared when the light vanished. Instead, he continued to speak, “I see movement, nothing but movement. I see matter and time and even

thought as nothing but movement, nothing but different classifications we impose upon movement... And it's all movement, nothing but movement.”

Now the light reappeared to Gary, a light that he recognized as pure movement, pure energy, though as he looked, he saw that it surpassed even this category. It was everything and nothing, the whole, the undifferentiated. It was that most complex thing imaginable: the absolutely simple.

SPARKS

Gary sat reading a book in the radio shack, killing the final minutes of an uneventful radio watch, when he heard the door to his stateroom open and close. He glanced up at the clock on the panel and, seeing that it was five minutes to five, time for him to knock off, he set his book aside and got out of his chair. He turned the antenna selector wheel over to the direction finder position, and as he did so, he heard the ding of the alarm bell indicating that the Auto Alarm system had been engaged. So with the radio now secured, he walked around behind the radio panel and through the short passageway leading into his stateroom to greet his visitor.

When he entered, Gary found his grey-bearded friend with the intelligent eyes, Socrates Smith, seated on the settee. And he warmly greeted this most welcome guest, "Hello Smitty, it's great to see you. How are you today?"

"Just fine, thanks."

"Would you like a beer?" asked Gary, and then without waiting for a reply, he went over to his ice chest, pulled out two beers and handed one of them to his friend. Smitty accepted it out of politeness, but then once he had the can in his hand, he set it down by his feet unopened, and there he left it without a further thought.

It was a part of their daily ritual for them to do this with the can of beer, and in fact, everything they had done up until now was part of that ritual: Smitty coming into the room at five minutes to five and sitting down on the settee, Gary coming in and greeting him with nearly the same words each day, giving him a can of beer and then sitting down on the bed. And the next step in their ritual was for Gary to bring up some subject that he wished to discuss, some historical or scientific or philosophical subject, and for Smitty to help him dissect it and analyze it, and for the two of them to hopefully arrive at some sort of conclusion before going down to eat supper.

On this particular day, Gary had a subject ready at hand, a subject he had just been reading about, and so without hesitation, he launched into the discussion. "I just read a very interesting theory about the first instants of the Big Bang that created the universe. You see, according to this theory..."

"Why do you want to waste your time talking about the Big Bang?" Smitty interrupted him.

Gary was taken aback at his friend's sharp tone, and he looked at him questioningly. "Waste my time?..."

"Yes! Don't you know that the Big Bang is nothing more than the creation myth of the scientific age?"

"The creation myth?"

“Yes, the creation myth, that’s all it is. It’s a creation myth just like that old story from Jewish mythology that Christians are so fond of, or like the one from the Hopi Indians or any of the rest of them.”

Smitty could be so irritating when he made these arrogant statements in that know-it-all tone of his. And perhaps the thing that Gary found most irritating of all was the way that he so often seemed to prove his points to be true. But in spite of what past experience may have had to teach him, Gary was far from ready to concede the point. “Oh, come on now! You know it’s a lot more than a myth. You know how well established it is. You know it’s a proven fact.”

“A proven fact, you say? Please define your terms, sir.”

Oh, shit! Not that old line! At least Gary knew enough by now not to fall for it. “All I’m saying is that it’s accepted as fact by virtually every scientist who has ever studied the beginnings of the universe, and that there’s a huge abundance of evidence that supports the Big Bang theory.”

“Evidence? What type of evidence? Is it direct evidence or is it circumstantial?”

“Why, it’s all circumstantial, of course. What else could it possibly be? Direct evidence of the Big Bang would be impossible...”

“Circumstantial, huh?” said Smitty with a smile and a step-into-my-trap tone.

“Yes, it’s circumstantial, but there’s so very much of it. There’s so much evidence supporting the Big Bang, while at the same time there’s not a single shred of evidence that conflicts with it. So it really leaves no room for a reasonable doubt. The Big Bang is the only logical explanation there is for all that evidence.”

“Oh, really?” Smitty made a dramatic pause. “But aren’t you leaving out the last part of your sentence?”

“The last part...?”

“Yes, you know. The part where you say that it’s the only logical explanation as long as we accept certain unproven assumptions to be valid.”

“Unproven assumptions? What unproven assumptions?” Gary was beginning to feel a bit off-balance.

“You know, like the assumption that there’s a fixed and unchanging past, the assumption that anything at all actually happened back at the time of the Big Bang. The assumption that there’s a past out there just waiting to be discovered by us.”

“Well, of course we make that assumption... I mean, there wouldn’t be any such thing as science without it.”

“And then there’s a second assumption, one where you assume that time never has and never will change. Where you assume that the tiny slice of time with which we’re familiar can be projected back into the extremely remote past in a completely unchanged form.”

“Unchanged? What are you talking about?”

“And how about the way you assume that no unknown factors would ever arise when dealing with the hugely distant past, the assumption that we already know all the factors there could possibly be between the time of the Big Bang and the present. The assumption that no unknown factors would arise that could change the entire situation and invalidate all our conclusions in exactly the same way that the America Factor arose to invalidate Columbus’s theories.”

“The America Factor? What the hell is that supposed to be?”

“You know what I mean. I’m talking about the way that his seemingly valid theory about being able to sail west all the way to Asia worked just fine until he ran up against the America Factor. Until he ran into the American continent blocking his way and preventing him from getting there.”

Smitty paused here, but upon seeing that Gary was at a loss for words, he continued with his thought. “And the thing about the Big Bang is that it’s so far away in the past, and you would have to traverse such huge expanses of unknown territory to get there, that there could be a whole series of America Factors between here and there. And any one of those unknowns could be enough to invalidate all the circumstantial evidence that scientists have ever accumulated.”

“Well, possibly so... But until one of those factors actually appears, I think we have to accept the conclusions of the Big Bang.” Gary began a bit hesitantly, but soon he was finding his footing. “And besides, the search for unknown factors is one of the things that science is all about. Why, if science is nothing else, it’s the constant search for the unknown and the unexplained.”

“And though it’s a noble search, how do you know that you’ll ever be able to uncover all those factors?”

“Well, you don’t... But I think you have to admit that given all the evidence we have, at least the Big Bang is a very strong theory.”

“Theory? How can you even dignify it by calling it a theory? How can you so degrade the word theory?” Smitty was back to his arrogant, know-it-all tone. “It’s no theory. It’s nothing but a conjecture, an empty conjecture.”

“How can you say that? It’s far more than a conjecture. It’s the only logical conclusion that can be drawn...”

“Logical!? How can you call it logical? What does logic have to do with anything we’ve just been discussing?” Smitty’s interruption was loud, and it was rude. And it shocked Gary into a silence that allowed Smitty to go on with his thought unimpeded.

“Logic has no place in dealing with metaphysical questions, and it has no place in any other type of conjecture. Logic is a very limited science and one that shouldn’t be used where it doesn’t belong. But in our culture, we’re so deeply in love with logic that we try to use it anywhere and everywhere. We over-use it and thereby devalue it. We love it so much that we love it to death.”

Gary hated it when Smitty took over their conversations and expounded in this way, but as he was still trying to formulate a reply, he was forced to allow the monologue to continue.

“Why, look at the way that so many theistic philosophers have actually gone so far as to place their misnamed logic above absolutely everything. And that includes placing it above their very God. Because when they’ve used their logic to prove the existence of God, what they’ve really been saying is that their phony logic is an even more fundamental principle of the universe than their God himself is. They’ve been saying that their God can only be real if he conforms to their logic, if he obeys the rules of their over-extended and misapplied logic. And right now, you are doing very much the same thing by applying your logic to the Big Bang.”

“So you don’t like logic? You don’t think we should use it as a basis for science?” Gary was finally ready to begin a counter-attack.

“No, that’s not what I said at all. Please don’t get me wrong.” Smitty refused to go onto the defensive. “I think logic is a wonderful thing, but I think it’s been very badly misused. I think it’s been wasted in areas where it doesn’t belong when it should be reserved for the one area where it truly applies.”

“And what area is that?”

“Why, the area of direct human experience, of course. The area of things that can be proven or disproven, just like in the logical system of Dignaga and Dharmakirti. Do you remember about them? We discussed them some time back.”

“Vaguely...” Now here was Smitty changing the subject and throwing Gary off-balance, using a tactic he often used to maintain control over the direction of their conversations.

“As you probably remember, the mechanics of their system were virtually identical to those in use in the west, but the great difference was the way they placed strict limits upon the applicability of their logic. The way they said that the great truths can only be dealt with through the direct experience of enlightenment, which allowed them to define their science in such a way as to limit it to much smaller questions. Do you remember that? Do you remember their definition of logic?”

“Wasn’t it something about logic leading to action, or action being logic...?”

“Yes, something like that. They defined logic as being thought that leads to successful action, or as thought that can be proven true through action, while any thought that can never be proven they considered to be extra-logical.”

Gary's memory was starting to return. "But wasn't there also another part to the definition where Dharmakirti said that logic was uncontradicted experience?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Well, as you know, the Big Bang has never been contradicted by any experience. All the experience we have—all the experiments and all the observations—support the theory. Nothing has ever contradicted it. So doesn't that mean that it's logical even by this strict definition of theirs?" He wasn't about to give up yet, though as it turned out, Smitty was ready for him, ready and waiting with an answer which he had already set up earlier.

"If you remember, Dharmakirti was referring to *direct* experience when he said that. His statement was that logic was uncontradicted *direct* experience. He never said anything about the type of circumstantial evidence you have to offer for the Big Bang. Evidence like that proves nothing at all. Indirect experience like that has no place in their system of logic."

"Yes, but..." Gary didn't want to concede the point, but he had no idea what to say next. He just knew that he wanted to say something to wipe that self-satisfied, gotcha-smile off Smitty's face. "But since we're not Buddhists and we don't necessarily believe in the enlightenment experience the way Dignaga and Dharmakirti did, what tool do we have left to deal with the big questions? I mean questions about Truth with a capital T and ultimate reality and the beginning of the universe and all that."

"You mean besides your Ouija Board?" and Smitty laughed at his stupid joke.

But Gary brushed off his feeble attempt at humor and continued with his thought. "So we just ignore all those questions? We just forget about them and live exclusively in your tiny little world of successful action and direct experience? Is that what you're saying?"

"I never said you couldn't think about those things. All I said was that you shouldn't call your thoughts logic." Smitty once again refused to go onto the defensive. "And when you no longer call it logic, why just look at the way you can use those questions to set yourself free."

"Set myself free? What are you...?"

"When you realize that those questions aren't logical and that they have no right or wrong answers, you no longer have any reason to take them seriously. And while you can still ask them all you like, you no longer have any obligation to answer them. You can turn those questions into games that you play rather than treating them like the components of some desperate search for meaning and for an illusory certainty."

"But what if that's not enough for me? What if I want certainty?"

"Well, then you're shit-outta-luck!" Smitty could be such an asshole! Gary was hurt and offended by this answer, and he refused to say anything in response to it. In fact, he was about to get up and walk out or to tell Smitty to leave his room. Something. Because as far as he was concerned, this conversation was now over.

But Smitty wasn't finished yet, and so he tried to do what he could to get things back on track. "All I'm saying is that there's no such thing as certainty when dealing with those questions. And if you resort to using sloppy logic on them, any certainty you achieve will be nothing but an illusion."

Gary wasn't buying it. He wanted an apology, and he was determined not to rejoin the conversation without one.

"And you know the system of logic I'm talking about isn't actually all that limited, not nearly as limited as you might think. I mean, it can be used to answer a great number of questions and a great variety of them. And in fact, it's even capable of providing answers to one or two questions that might appear metaphysical at first glance."

So what! So who cares? So why doesn't this guy just shut up and go away?

"Why, it can even be used to help us understand a few things about the frontiers of physics, to help us understand some of those areas where modern physics very nearly shades over into metaphysics."

Physics! Did he just say physics? Well if he's gonna talk about physics, maybe Gary should forget about the apology and get back into the conversation. "Like what areas of physics are you talking about?"

"Oh, I don't know. Like, uh..." Smitty had just been dangling that idea out there as a way of arousing Gary's interest, and he really had no idea of where he wanted to go with it.

But Gary knew. Gary loved physics, and he was perfectly willing to take the lead. "Like maybe you're talking about the way quantum mechanics has disproved the old metaphysical concepts of determinism and objectivity. Is that what you mean?" He paused briefly, but not long enough to allow Smitty to speak. "Like the way quantum mechanics has shown that sub-atomic events aren't subject to determinism. That they seem to occur at random, and that the only thing we can ever predict about them is the probability of their occurrence. Nothing more. And on a similar note, the way it's been shown that sub-atomic particles aren't objects at all in the way we normally use that term, that they don't exist in an absolute sense. The way it's been shown that they have nothing more than a tendency to exist, with their actual existence or non-existence at any given moment being once again the result of probability. Is that what you mean?"

"Well, not exactly..."

"No? Then what has all this proven?" Gary wanted an answer.

But Smitty was still groping. "I'm not sure that it's proven anything in the long run. I'm not sure that it's done anything more than raise additional questions..."

"It hasn't proven anything? How can you say that?"

“Well, I’ll admit that it’s disproved a simplistic, linear determinism and also what you could call a naïve-materialist form of objectivity. But I don’t know that it’s proven or disproved much of anything else in those areas.”

“So you’re saying that determinism and objectivity could still exist in spite of all the proof that quantum mechanics has provided against their existence?”

“Yes, I’m saying that they could still exist in a more profound, more sophisticated form. Like what I’m talking about here would be a multi-dimensional determinism or a non-absolute, interdependent sort of objectivity. Those things could perfectly well still exist in spite of everything. Those things have never been disproved by anything in modern physics.”

“So they exist, is that what you’re saying? They exist in these so-called sophisticated forms?” Gary wanted to pin this slippery rascal down.

“I’m not saying that they do, and I’m not saying that they don’t. All I’m saying is that they haven’t been proven one way or the other. I mean, when you look at the tools that physicists have available to them for answering those questions, you should make note of the fact that they’re all based on the assumption of objectivity, the assumption that we’re studying something that actually exists ‘out there.’ So to take those tools and then turn around and try to use them to prove or disprove objectivity? Well, all you’re doing is running around in circles. All you’re doing is proving something that you’ve already assumed.”

“So what did you mean, then, if you weren’t talking about objectivity? What did you mean when you said we could prove certain things through physics?” Gary was rapidly running some of the ideas of physics over in his mind. “Were you talking about the way it’s disproved the possibility of the neutral observer?”

“The neutral observer?” Smitty was still unsure of exactly where they were going.

“You know, like the way that wave/particle experiments have shown that we can only observe sub-atomic events by participating in them. That in a certain way, we actually create those events when we observe them.” Gary was back on a roll now. “Like I’m talking here about those experiments where we see how the quantum world behaves like waves up until the moment we make an observation for particles, at which point it begins to behave like particles. While on the other hand, if we make our observation for waves, it goes right on behaving like waves as though nothing had ever happened. So what that means is that we’ve actually made the quantum world behave in one way or the other simply by observing it.”

“Have we?”

“Certainly we have. What other explanation could there be?”

“Oh, I don’t know about explanations... But please help me clarify one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“I want to know what you mean by observing the quantum world. Do you mean just looking at it?”

“No, of course not! You know it’s way too small to be observed by us directly. We have to use measuring devices in order to observe it.”

“Exactly!” Smitty had just had his Eureka! moment. He had brought up the subject of physics with no other plan besides luring Gary out: making him stop pouting and rejoin the conversation. And now with this last statement, he was finally beginning to see a clear path ahead. “So your observations are nothing but a series of readings on measuring devices, huh? And that means that they have nothing in common with the way we observe the everyday world around it, doesn’t it?”

“Nothing in common...?”

“So how can you say that it’s your observations that make the quantum world behave like waves or like particles? How can you say that it’s not your measuring devices?”

“The devices...?” Gary found himself losing control of the conversation once again.

“Yes, how can you say that the observer-created effects you’ve just talked about aren’t actually measuring-device-created effects?”

“You can’t, I guess... But the quantum world is so small that we have no other way of observing it.” He was beginning to plead.

“Yes, and that’s precisely why it’s impossible to really prove anything at all about the sub-atomic world. Because it’s so small. It’s so far removed from our day-to-day experience that we can only observe it through an extremely limited perspective. We can only observe it through occasional readings on measuring devices. We can’t observe it directly or continuously in the same way we observe things from our normal human perspective.”

“Well, I suppose that’s true... But if we can’t prove any of those things I’ve brought up because of this perspective problem, then what exactly were you referring to earlier?”

“About what we can prove? Well, let me bring up an experiment that I think might be pertinent to the case. I’m sure you must be familiar with the Schrodinger’s Cat thought experiment.”

“The cat-in-the-box? Of course I’m familiar with it. But I don’t see...”

“It’s the experiment in which you close a cat up inside a box...”

“You close it up inside a box,” Gary interrupted him right back, “a box where some kind of sub-atomic event may or may not trigger a device that will kill the cat, with the final outcome depending upon the probability curves of the sub-atomic event in question. Yes, I’m very familiar with it. But I don’t see what you hope to prove by it.”

“What I find so interesting about that experiment is the way it’s sometimes interpreted.”

“Are you referring to the so-called Copenhagen Interpretation? The interpretation that says that the cat is both alive and dead as long as the box is closed, and that it only becomes absolutely one or the other in an observer-created reality at the moment that the box is finally opened. Is that what you’re referring to?”

“Yes, that’s what I mean.”

“But I thought you just rejected the idea of an observer-created reality. So how can you turn around now and accept it? And in this case not only are you accepting it for the sub-atomic event that might kill the cat, but you also seem to be accepting it for the dead-and-alive cat. You seem to be accepting the idea that not only is quantum weirdness real, but also that it can be transferred to the real world of cats in boxes through an experiment like this one.”

“Did I say that? Did I say I accepted their interpretation? All I said was that I find it interesting. And what I find so interesting isn’t their idea that quantum weirdness can be transferred from the microscopic to the macroscopic world. What I find interesting is the mechanism by which this supposed transference takes place.”

“The way it takes place? You mean by putting the cat in the box?” Gary was becoming confused.

“No, that’s not what I mean.”

“By opening the box...?”

“No, the cat and the box and the sub-atomic event that can kill the cat have nothing to do with it. Because the way the transference takes place is through the very act of interpreting the experiment. The physical aspects of the experiment have nothing to do with it. The transference of quantum weirdness into the macroscopic world is purely the result of interpreting the experiment in a certain way.”

“Interpreting it...”

“Yes, you see the transference takes place when we apply a totally subjective interpretation to the experiment, when we say that the only reality is what we directly observe. When we say that everything that takes place inside the closed box is nothing but probability curves of the live-and-dead cat, and that it only becomes real when we open the box and observe the cat as being either alive or dead. So it’s through the very act of interpretation that we create the quantum weirdness in this particular case.”

“Our interpretation creates the weirdness?... Does that mean that all quantum weirdness comes from the way we interpret our experiments? Is that the point you’re trying to make?”

“Oh, I don’t know about that, though it’s possible... And especially when you combine our subjective interpretations with the extremely limited perspective we have upon the sub-atomic world. It might be the only reason, but then again it might not.”

“It might or it might not...” Gary was ready for a counter-attack if this was the point that Smitty had set out to prove, but as Smitty refused to commit himself, Gary was forced to allow him to continue with his thought.

“Or here’s another thought experiment for you. Say that you only accepted what you actually saw with your own eyes as real, with everything taking place outside your range of vision being nothing more than probability curves. In an interpretation like that, you would find the same sort of observer-created reality each time you turned and looked behind you that you find in the Copenhagen Interpretation, wouldn’t you? You’d find the same sort of collapse of probability curves into an observer-created event.

“And just to make the situation more interesting, say you also had a severe visual impairment that only allowed you to get occasional very brief glimpses of very small areas of the world around you. An impairment that left your perspective on the world just as limited as our perspective on the sub-atomic world is. Now in that case, don’t you think that the entire world you saw would appear just as weird to you as the quantum world appears? Don’t you think you’d be living in an entire world of quantum weirdness?”

“Well, I guess. But I thought you already said that you couldn’t prove it was the interpretation that created the weirdness.”

“And you can’t! But isn’t it interesting the way that the two perspectives resemble each other so much? The way that by using a totally subjective perspective to interpret the everyday world, you can make that world nearly indistinguishable from the sub-atomic world when interpreted from a so-called objective perspective? The way that when dealing with the sub-atomic world, the difference between subjective and objective reality seems to disappear altogether?”

“So the sub-atomic world is subjective...”

“Not necessarily, but since it can never be observed in what we would call an objective way, it’s bound to appear subjective to us. We can never know what it is objectively because we can never observe it objectively.”

“And the reason it appears to defy the laws of objectivity is because we observe it in this subjective way?”

“Yes, that’s right. Or at least it may be right, though it can never be proven one way or the other.”

“It can’t be proven?... You mean that’s not your point? You mean that’s not what you set out to prove?”

“No, it’s not.” Smitty hadn’t originally set out to prove anything, of course, but now he felt that he was in a position to lead this conversation in the direction he wanted it to go. “But you see, though we can’t prove that the differences between the perspectives used in observing the micro- and macro-worlds are the cause of the differences we find between those worlds, I think there’s one thing that we can say has definitely been proven.”

“And what’s that?”

“It’s that the perspectives are different.” Smitty paused for effect, but all he got from Gary was a well-duh-look. “Our perspective on the micro-world is indirect and discontinuous and resembles what we would call a subjective one, while our perspective on the macro-world is direct and continuous. It’s what we call objective.”

“And...”

“And that’s it. We have two very different perspectives.”

“That’s your conclusion!? That’s what you’ve been leading up to!? That the perspectives are different? What a waste of time!!” Gary felt like he’d been had.

“Waste of time? What do you mean by calling the question of perspective a waste of time?” Smitty was shooting right back at him. “Why, if there’s anything of any real philosophical importance that we can learn from modern science, it’s the importance of perspective. It’s the way that the perspective we use in making an observation plays such a decisive role in determining not only the scope of the results we obtain, but also in determining the way in which we interpret those results. And if you want to talk about an observer-created reality, about an observer creating his own reality rather than merely observing it, you could say that he does it through the very act of adopting a perspective.”

“He creates a reality by adopting a perspective? Are you serious?”

“Okay, no, I’ll admit it. I’m stretching it a bit with that last statement. But you do have to admit that it’s impossible to make an observation without first adopting a perspective, don’t you? That every single observation we make has to be made from some perspective or other?”

“Yeah, I suppose...” Gary went along grudgingly.

“And you’ll also have to admit that the perspective used is one of the most basic aspects of the observation made. That in fact it’s as basic to the observation as the system of space-time within which the whole thing takes place.”

“As basic as space-time?”

“Yes, because in the same way that a scientific observation must be made within a system of space-time, it must also be made from some perspective. And this means that perspective is one of the basic parameters of science. It means that it’s in the same class as space and time.”

“Well, of course it has to be made from some perspective, I’ll admit that. But to jump from that point to comparing it to space-time, I think you’re going way too far when you do that.”

“Too far, you say? You don’t think it should be classed with space and time? Well then, just try making an observation without a perspective. Or what comes down to the same thing, try making it without an observer.” Smitty was shifting into his unrelenting, beat-it-into-you mode.

A mode with which Gary was all too familiar, though one that failed to intimidate him. “Come on now, I already admitted that you need a perspective if you want to make an observation. There’s no argument there. But what I don’t accept is your comparing this perspective, this human point-of-view or whatever you’d like to call it, with the great dimensions of space and time. I just don’t see that they’re on the same level.”

“You don’t? You don’t!? Well you know what? You’re right for once!” Uncharacteristically, Smitty seemed to be backing down. “You’re absolutely right. Because a single perspective is no more a great dimension like space and time than a single point in space is the space-dimension. You’re right. You’re a hundred percent right.”

“Oh, so I guess...”

“But that’s not to say that the perspective we’re talking about isn’t located within a great dimension in exactly the same way that the point in space I just mentioned is located within the space-dimension. It’s not to say that there isn’t a third great dimension within which this perspective can be situated and measured.”

“A third great dimension? Are you talking about consciousness here? Are you trying to prove the existence of consciousness?”

“No, I’m not talking about consciousness at all. Consciousness doesn’t interest me. Consciousness is nothing but a sort of mental energy, and the perspective that I’ve just been discussing isn’t a measurement of energy at all. It’s a dimensional measurement. It’s a measurement of a point from which observations are made, a measurement of mental space if I can use that term. It has nothing to do with the energy that inhabits that space. It’s a measurement of the mind-dimension.”

“And you’re out to prove something about this mind-dimension rather than dealing with consciousness?”

“Exactly. I’m out to prove the existence of the dimension and nothing more. And so in the very same way that I ignore the question of matter when I talk about space-time, I also ignore consciousness when I talk about the mind-dimension. I’m not interested in whatever it is that supposedly exists within those dimensions. I’m interested in the dimensions themselves. I’m interested in the mind-dimension itself.”

“And this mind-dimension, what? You think that now you’ve proven it? You think you’ve already said everything you need to say in order to prove its existence?”

“Well, yes...” Now it was Smitty who was becoming hesitant.

“Bullshit!”

“So you don’t accept the, uh...? I thought you agreed with me earlier that every observation had to be made from some perspective, didn’t you? Well, that would locate it within the mind-dimension. And when it comes to the question of thinking, of that process we call human thought—and I’m referring here strictly to human thought since that’s the only type of

thinking with which we've had any direct experience—that thought process requires a thinker, doesn't it? I mean, how could there be any thinking taking place without one? And of course this human thinker must have a perspective in exactly the same way that a human observer has one, which means that this thinker's perspective must also be located somewhere within the mind-dimension, mustn't it? In fact, it seems to me that the very existence of mind in any form makes the existence of some sort of mind-dimension inarguable. Don't you agree with me?"

"Well, if you're gonna define this mind-dimension of yours in that way... But what about when you're dealing with an inanimate object? What about when you're dealing with that can of beer right there at your feet? Is that can of beer located within this mind-dimension of yours in the same way it's located within space-time?"

"Of course it is. You just thought about it, didn't you?"

"Yeah..."

"Well then it must have some mental aspect, some mental property that allows it to be observed and thought about. It must have some property that allows it to interact with your mind."

"A mental property? Are you back to the question of consciousness again? Are you trying to tell me that it's conscious?"

"No, not at all. The idea that a can of beer is capable of consciousness or thought is not only silly, but it's also a waste of time since it can never be proven one way or the other. No, what I'm talking about here is the fact that it can be the object of thought, the fact that it can be thought about, which is something that can easily be proven simply by thinking about it."

"The object of thought? Are you making some reference to Platonic Ideals here?"

"I think you mean Socratic Ideals, don't you!?" Smitty was deeply offended by the use of the term. "That Plato never had an original thought in his life! Everything he ever said he copied from me... er, from Socrates, I mean. And his whole spiel about Ideals was little more than a misinterpretation and a misunderstanding of m... Socrates' original position."

Gary was surprised at the passion his statement had aroused, and he decided not to say anything for the moment. Instead, he waited for Smitty to calm down and continue. "What I'm saying is that it also exists as an idea, that it can serve as an object of thought. I'm saying that it can interact with the mind of a thinker, and that since this interaction takes place within the mind-dimension, therefore the object in question must also exist within mind in the very same way it exists within space-time. I'm saying that everything that exists must exist in exactly this way. Everything must exist within all the three great dimensions of space-time-mind."

Smitty waited for a response, but Gary was at a loss for words. "I don't know..."

"So do you think there's anything in science that doesn't have a mental aspect? Anything that can't either think or be thought about or both?"

“No... I mean, if you’re gonna define this mind-dimension the way you define it...”

“So you accept that I’ve proven it beyond a reasonable doubt?”

“Like I say, when you define it that way, there’s no real arguing with it.” Gary didn’t want to give in, but he was running out of arguments.

“Well now, that’s the real point I’ve been trying to make all along.” Smitty was lying, of course, since this was a conclusion that he’d stumbled upon in the course of the conversation rather than being something he’d planned and prepared for at an early stage. “I’ve been trying to prove that we live in a world not only of space-time but also of mind. And if we were to include mind in all our calculations of the physical world, why just look at what a huge area of study it would unlock for us. Look at how it would enable us to carry our thought and our reasoning and even our logic so much further than had ever seemed possible before in a world made up solely of space-time. Look at what a huge mental frontier this system of space-time-mind could open up for us.”

“Okay, so just for the sake of argument, let’s say that I agree with you. So now tell me, how exactly does this mind-dimension relate to space-time? Would it be like the fifth dimension in the same way that time is the fourth dimension?”

“You know, that question’s a bit too complex to go into right now, what with supper waiting. So why don’t we go down and get a bite to eat and then continue our discussion later?”

“Okay, you’re right. But please before we go, could you answer my last question?”

“About it being a fifth dimension? No, the mind-dimension doesn’t relate to space-time in that way at all. The relationship is much different. It’s something like the relationship that was hinted at in the works of Dignaga and Dharmakirti and that, many centuries later, was explained much more clearly by Kant.”

“Oh, so you mean that space and time are mental categories? They’re categories that are imposed upon our experiences by our minds?”

“Yes and no. Because if you remember when we discussed Kant’s ideas some time back, I told you how I agreed but also disagreed with him... As I just said, it’s way too complex to go into right now. Let’s go get some supper.”

“Okay, let’s go. But remember, this discussion isn’t over yet!”

“I’ll remember.”

Gary opened the door and held it open, but when Smitty stepped outside, he stepped right into the path of the Second Mate coming down the passageway. Both of them jerked to a halt in time to avoid a collision, and after Smitty quickly retreated back into Gary’s stateroom, the Second Mate continued on his way to the bridge.

He entered the bridge shaking his head in disbelief, and he greeted the Third Mate in an incredulous tone, “Jesus Christ, that crazy fuckin’ Sparks is startin’ to get to me. Why, just now I thought I damn near saw that invisible friend of his he’s always talkin’ to.”

THE CRITIQUE OF FERMENTED REASON

Gary stood behind the bar, fighting boredom on a slow, uneventful afternoon. He turned and scanned the wall behind the bar until his eyes fixed upon one of the posters hanging there, and when he re-read the poster—Our credit manager is Helen Waite; if you want credit, go to Helen Waite—he chuckled softly. That joke was one of the funniest things he'd ever seen, and though he'd read it hundreds of times, it still made him laugh every time. Why, it was even funnier than the poster in the men's room—We aim to please; you aim, too, please—which had made him laugh so hard that he peed all over himself the day he finally figured out the joke.

There was nothing Gary liked better than a good joke, one simple enough that he could figure it out without too much explanation, but today there was no one in the bar to tell jokes with. No, his only customers were a quiet, unfriendly type sitting alone down at the end of the bar and a pair of winos seated in one of the booths.

Winos! Gary hated winos, and he wouldn't have let those two into his bar if there had been any customers for them to bother. But since today was such a slow day... Besides, he knew one of them, the older one, the one the other winos called the Professor, and he knew that he wasn't a troublemaker. The Professor never caused any problems. He'd just sit there paying for the drinks and spouting off about philosophy or some other type of bullshit to anyone who needed a drink badly enough to listen to him. And today, it seemed that he'd found an audience, a youngish wino with dirty long blond hair who'd done some talking himself when they first entered, but who was now so drunk that the professor's words bounced right off him without penetrating his benumbed brain. In spite of his audience's condition, though, the Professor continued his discourse. And Gary, having nothing better to do today, leaned forward to listen to him.

"As I was saying, what Kant called the Thing-In-Itself, or what could be called Ultimate Reality, is actually pure sensation, pure experience, before any categories are imposed upon it by the mind and before any interpretation whatsoever is made of the experience, before the mind constructs a mental image of the 'object' that is experienced. This is the Thing-In-Itself, this pure experience.

"But the problem in philosophy is that we're not dealing with pure experience. We're dealing exclusively with the post-interpretation world, with the already-constructed mental images or 'objects.' All our philosophical discussions are discussions of these 'objects' so that the Thing-In-Itself, or Ultimate Reality, has no meaning. It's a wholly superfluous, foreign concept that has no place in philosophy."

The Professor paused here to watch his audience's reaction, but the only reaction he received was a pronounced sagging of the eyelids as the young wino drew closer and closer to the drunken stupor he longed for. The Professor saw the eyelids closing and knew that if he didn't resume his discourse quickly, he'd soon lose his audience altogether.

"You see, when a philosopher speaks about a man, he's speaking about his idea 'man,' his mental image of 'man.' He's not speaking about a real, material man. Whenever he speaks or thinks, he's speaking or thinking about ideas rather than realities. Whatever the nature of the real

world may be, the world of pure experience, of direct perception, our minds are only capable of manipulating ideas. Our minds can't manipulate the real world, but only the world of ideas—the ideal world—so all our philosophy deals exclusively with this ideal world. Philosophy is a science of the ideal world and has nothing to do with the real world.

“Even when we discuss realism and the real world of pure experience, we're only discussing our ideas 'realism' and 'real world,' which is why I say that philosophy is a science of ideas, not realities. The real world has no importance in philosophy, and the question of whether or not it actually exists, and if it exists, of whether or not it's identical to the ideal world, are meaningless. These questions, and all other questions dealing with the real world, are of no philosophical importance whatsoever as they lie outside of philosophy. They lie outside of the ideal world with which philosophy deals.”

The Professor paused once again, but now he saw that his audience's eyes had closed completely and that his head was sagging forward. Realizing that he had to act quickly if he wanted to revive his audience's attention before it was too late, he turned toward the bartender and signaled for two more drinks. Gary saw the signal since he'd been watching and listening to the Professor for the last few minutes, but he also saw the young wino's head sagging. So rather than making more drinks, he walked over to the booth to warn the winos that if they started to go to sleep, he'd throw them out.

The young wino opened his eyes and signaled with his hand that he'd heard the warning, while the Professor assured Gary that he wouldn't let his friend sleep, to which Gary replied, “You won't let him sleep? With that bullshit you're talkin' about? Why, I don't see how anyone can stay awake listenin' to you. You damn near put *me* to sleep!”

“Bullshit? You call the immortal ideas of Immanuel Kant bullshit?”

“The ideas of who?”

“Kant, Immanuel Kant. Surely you've heard of him.”

“Kant?... Kant?... Oh yeah, I know who you're talkin' about. He was that songwriter friend of Beethoven's, right?”

“What...?” The answer caught the Professor off-guard.

“But I don't see what he's got to do with what you been talkin' about.”

“No, my friend. Kant wasn't a songwriter, and he wasn't a composer, either. He was a philosopher, that's what he was. And not just any philosopher, either, but the greatest of all philosophers.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes! And what I was discussing just now was one of his deepest, most profound ideas, his theory of the Thing-In-Itself.”

“What thing in what?”

“The Thing-In-Itself! Surely you’re familiar with Kant’s theory of the Thing-In-Itself?” The Professor awaited an answer, but when none was forthcoming, he tried another tack. “Or perhaps you’re more familiar with the point I was discussing earlier, the point about Kant’s discussion of our *a priori* intuitions of space and time?”

“Our what?... Something about space?”

“Our concept of space. The part when I explained about how we acquire our concept of space, about how we know that space exists.”

“You want to know if space exists, is that what you’re sayin’? Damn right it exists! Why guys have been clear to the moon, that’s how we know it exists. Guys have been there!” Gary confidently offered up the definitive answer.

“I’m not speaking about that type of space, you... I’m speaking about the generic term space, about space in general, about the space all around us, about the space outside and the space right here inside this bar. That’s the type of space I’m speaking about, and when I ask you how we know that space exists, I’m asking how we know that any space at all exists.” The Professor’s tone was becoming increasingly aggressive.

“Oh, you want to know...”

“I want to know how we can tell that the space right here in this room exists, or the space separating you and me. How can we know that this space exists?”

“How do we know it exists? Why, we can see it.”

“See it? You say we can see space? Think about it. When you look at me, you see me, but you don’t see the space between us, do you?”

“Yeah, maybe not, but I see you over there, not over here! So what do you call that if it ain’t space?” Gary was once again offering a definitive answer, one obvious enough that even this old wino with the stewed brain should be able to understand it.

“But what do you mean by here and there? What are here and there but positions within space? And how can we know that these positions exist if we don’t already know that space exists?”

“What?... Here and there... and space...?” Gary hadn’t been expecting this response at all.

The Professor, seeing his opportunity had now arrived, began one of his discourses. “You see, the problem with space, and with time as well, is that our knowledge of it can’t possibly have an empirical origin. It can’t come to us through our senses, since we can’t directly sense space or time, so it must come from some other source, and that source must be our minds, just as Kant said. Our concepts of space and time must be some sort of products or categories of our

minds rather than being true properties of the physical world that we acquire through our senses.”

The Professor paused here to give his now expanded audience an opportunity to reply, but the only response he got was a blank stare from Gary and a light snore from the young wino who was now sound asleep. Seeing that he was on his own in this conversation, the Professor continued. “But it’s here that I disagree with Kant, in that he claimed that space and time are *a priori* intuitions, intuitions that must exist there *a priori*, which is to say that they must exist before any perception at all can take place. Now, in saying this, Kant was ignoring the fact that prior to our concepts of space and time, there’s an even more basic, fundamental *a priori* intuition that must exist: our concept of subject and object. Our distinguishing of a separation between subject and object, between self and other, and also the related concept of an interaction taking place between these two.

“This subject-object-interaction concept is the most basic of all mental constructions. It’s the intuition that must come from each mind before any experience or perception can take place. And in fact, it’s the subject-object-interaction concept that makes our concepts of space and time necessary in the first place, as no sooner do we distinguish a separation between subject and object than we make the existence of a space-concept necessary, since there must be some sort of space within which the subject and object are separated. And at the same time, our concept of an interaction taking place between subject and object makes a time-concept necessary, since any interaction implies the existence of dynamism, of movement and change. And the existence of dynamism implies the existence of time, of some sort of measurement of movement and change.

“So you see, our true *a priori* intuition is our adoption of a self-perspective, our rejection of the mystical perspective and our adoption instead of a perspective based on the concept of subject-object-interaction. For in the mystical state, there is no differentiation between subject and object, and consequently no space- or time-concepts exist. And it is this state that must be rejected intuitively by the mind if that mind is to acquire an individual existence, if it is to have any experiences or perceptions at all.”

The Professor paused to study his audience, but when he looked at Gary, he was no longer greeted by a blank stare. For Gary had by now so completely lost track of what the Professor was talking about that his eyes—and his mind—had wandered off to other subjects. And at this very moment, Gary was looking at the sleeping young wino and thinking that it was time to throw him out of the bar. The Professor saw what was happening and saw that his discourse was about to be rudely terminated if he didn’t act quickly, and so he did the only thing he could think of to draw Gary back into the conversation. He asked him a question. “Tell me, are you familiar with the mystical state?”

“What?... What’s that?” Gary had been tuning the Professor out, but upon hearing a question addressed to him, he began to tune back in.

“I asked if you know what I mean by a mystical experience.”

“Musical experience? What type of music?”

“No, mystical! A mystical experience.”

“Oh, mystical. You’re talkin’ about mystical, like with God and religion and stuff like that, is that it?”

“Something like that, yes.”

“Well sure, I been to church. I been there lots of times.”

The Professor was trying to humor his audience and thereby avoid being thrown out of the bar, but his patience was rapidly growing thin. “I don’t mean going to church. I mean a mystical experience, what a Christian would call a direct experience with God, or what could be called a union with God.”

“What’s that you say? Something about God and the unions? Is that what you’re asking: if God’s on the side of the unions?”

“No, that’s not what I’m asking! I’m asking if you’ve ever... Oh, forget it!” The Professor could see that it was a waste of time trying to hold an intelligent conversation with this dummy, or any conversation at all, for that matter. No, if he wanted an intelligent conversation, his only option was to talk to himself. “Let’s get back to what I was saying. Remember how I explained that our true *a priori* intuition isn’t space and time, but rather it’s our concept of subject-object-interaction? Well, what this means is that space and time are actually secondary concepts, just like cause-and-effect. It means that the concepts of space and time aren’t inherent properties of the human mind, but rather they’re concepts that can be synthesized from experience, concepts that can be learned in just the same way that we learn the concept of cause-and-effect.

“So not only is the system of space and time in which we live, the system of three-dimensional space and linear time, not a true property of the physical world, just as Kant said, but it’s not even an inherent property of our minds. Rather, it’s nothing more than a system of space and time that we learn through experience and through education.”

The Professor paused for emphasis, and he was about to ask a question aimed at drawing Gary back into the conversation when he thought better of the idea and decided to continue his discourse alone. “So you see, education is a factor of vital importance in the construction and maintenance of our system of space and time. It’s through education that each new generation adopts the system of space and time that has been taught to it by the preceding generation, in just the same way that it adopts the language of the preceding generation.

“And I think there’s a very intimate relationship between language and the concepts of three-dimensional space and linear time, as well as the concept of cause-and-effect. I think that these things are all programmed into our children together, at the same early age, and it’s this fact that makes it impossible for us to know what our inherent concepts of space and time could be, or even to know if we have any such inherent concepts. Because after all, we can only ask children about space and time after we’ve already taught them how to speak, and at that point, they’ve already adopted our concepts of three-dimensional space and linear time. We as adults can’t possibly remember what sort of space- and time-concepts we had as babies, and if we were to ask a baby now about those concepts, it wouldn’t answer us, or at least it wouldn’t give us an answer that we could understand.”

The Professor laughed lightly at his own joke, and Gary reflexively joined in. “Hey, that’s pretty funny,” said Gary between laughs, though the truth of the matter was that he had no idea of what they were laughing about since he’d tuned the Professor back out sometime earlier. “That’s a good joke, but now it’s my turn to tell one.”

“What...?”

“Okay, tell me: What has four wheels and flies?” Gary paused briefly, then answered himself. “A garbage truck!” He laughed heartily at his own joke and looked at the Professor who, in a fresh effort to humor the man with the power to expel him from the bar, managed to grin weakly. After a few moments, Gary caught his breath long enough to ask, “Have you ever heard that one before?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“No?” Gary thought this guy must be even dumber than he’d been thinking. “Well, now it’s your turn to tell one.”

“I don’t know any.”

“It doesn’t have to be like mine. Just any joke. Go ahead and tell me a joke.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know any jokes!” The Professor was trying to cut Gary short.

“None? Ah come on, you must know a joke. Everybody knows one... Why, you could probably make some real good jokes out of that stuff you was just talkin’ about.”

“What stuff?”

“You know, that stuff you was talkin’ about. That stuff about space and about mystical this and priori that.”

Now the Professor was truly offended. “You want me to make jokes about the most profound ideas ever conceived by the human mind? about the greatest accomplishments of human intelligence? No, my friend, I won’t do it! I refuse to make jokes about those things. I refuse!”

Gary wasn’t sure whether the Professor was serious about what he was saying or whether he was building up to a joke, so he decided to remain silent and let the guy continue.

“No, I won’t make jokes. I’ll only tell you what I’ve been telling you before, that space and time aren’t *a priori* intuitions at all, but rather that they’re *a posteriori* constructions of the mind.”

“Posteriori, that’s funny.” Gary laughed uncertainly but stopped short when he saw the hard look the Professor gave him.

“That’s not funny. I’m merely explaining the difference between an inherent category of the mind and an acquired concept, one that has been handed down and built up over the entire history of mankind.”

Gary could see from the Professor’s dead serious eyes that he wasn’t building up to tell a joke. —No, this guy has no sense of humor at all.

“Of course, here the question arises: if our concepts of space and time have been handed down from generation to generation, how is it that different cultures which have had no contact with each other have all created nearly identical concepts of space and time?”

—This guy really is a jerk. Anyone who won’t even tell jokes...

“That’s a very good question, and I think there’s only one possible explanation. And that is the fact that the ‘standard’ concepts of space and time have proven very successful in allowing humans to deal with their environment. These concepts, more than any other concepts of space and time, have allowed people to survive and thereby to hand down their concepts to subsequent generations, so that three-dimensional space and linear time are the ‘fittest’ concepts in the sense that Darwin spoke of the survival of the fittest.”

—Darwin! That’s the last straw! “Are you talkin’ about Darwin!? In my bar!!? No one talks about evolution in my bar, goddamn it. I’m a Christian! Get outa here, you drunk! I ain’t gonna listen to you no more... Darwin! and evolution! right here in my bar!! I’ll be damned if I’ll let people talk about evolution in here... Goddamned wino!”

SPARKS (REPRISE)

Gary entered the officers' saloon followed by Smitty, and he stopped at the salad counter where he selected a plate and a bottle of dressing before starting toward his seat. But then halfway there, he stopped and turned to Smitty. "Hey, why don't you sit with me today? The Second Mate's already eaten, so you can sit in his place, and that way we can continue our conversation."

And while Smitty nodded in agreement and walked over to the mates' table with his friend, he wasn't the only person in the room to react to Gary's words. In fact, everyone had stopped what they were doing and had turned to stare at Gary. The Day Third Engineer at the table next to Gary's, the Captain and the Chief Engineer at their table along the forward bulkhead, the First Engineer further over along that same bulkhead, the two Cadets back at their corner table, the Messman standing by the pantry door, all of them stared at Gary as he took his seat and began to study the menu.

Gary, completely unaware of the stares being directed his way, soon spoke to Smitty again. "I see they have pork chops today. How does that sound to you?"

"It sounds fine."

So Gary signaled to the Messman that he was ready to order, at which point the Messman hesitated for a moment before slowly and cautiously approaching the mates' table. And then when he reached what he thought would be a safe distance, a distance where he would still be able to get away in case this crazy man should suddenly turn violent, he stopped and spoke to Gary. "Yeah?"

"Hello, Leonard, how are you doing? Say, I think I'm going to try your pork chops today, with mashed potatoes, peas and corn. And Mr. Smith is going to have the same thing, so that's two orders."

"Say what...?"

"I said two orders of pork chops with mashed potatoes, peas and corn."

"Two orders?" And Leonard's eyes bugged out of his head as he jumped back several steps, afraid to turn his back on Gary while still within lunging distance of the table. And then once he felt that he had gotten safely away, he turned and rushed into the pantry where he called down to the galley over the inter-com. "Hey, man, you tell the Steward to come up here right away."

"What's wrong?" the voice from the galley asked.

"It's that crazy Sparks. He's orderin' for two people now. You tell the Steward I ain't gonna serve him no more! I ain't goin' nowhere near that guy! You tell the Steward."

Just as Leonard finished speaking with the galley, the Third Mate entered the room and sat down at the mates' table right across from Smitty. He'd had a growing feeling that something was wrong while on his way over to the table, what with the way the Cadets kept looking over at Sparks and laughing, and with the way the Day Third Engineer, who was sitting practically next to Sparks, was wolfing down his food without looking up, hurrying to get it done and get out of there. And then the moment Sparks spoke to him, his suspicions were dramatically confirmed.

"Hello, Bill, you're just in time."

"In time for what?"

"In time to hear Smitty explain his theories about how space and time relate to mind."

"Smitty?"

"Yes, Smitty... Don't you know Smitty?" And Gary indicated the vacant seat across from Bill.

But no sooner had Sparks made this gesture than Bill was on his feet and walking away from the table, followed by the Day Third Engineer. Bill went to the pantry where Leonard was hiding out waiting for the Steward to arrive, and he told Leonard to give him a plate to take to his room, a plate of whatever they had available.

Gary shrugged his shoulders at seeing Bill so suddenly—and so rudely—leave the table, and he spoke to Smitty. "Well, I guess some people just don't like philosophy... But don't worry about it. You still have me to explain your theories to. I won't get up and walk out. I'll listen to, uh... where were we now?"

"We were just discussing my critique of Kant," said Smitty with a certain air, an air that shaded very near arrogance, the air of a person who felt himself qualified to have his own personal critique of the great thinkers of the past. "So now tell me, what do you still remember from that discussion we had before? Do you remember how I said that although I may disagree with him on some of the details of his ideas, still he was on the right track in stating that the basic concepts of space and time couldn't have come to us from experience, since those concepts had to be there first, before the experience."

"Yes, because there couldn't possibly have been any first experience that came to us without our already holding some concepts of space and time. I remember that."

"Right, but then as far as those details that I just mentioned, I said that I don't accept his idea that our original concepts necessarily had to be the three-dimensional space and linear time that we now hold as our models. Because I don't see that those exact forms of space and time are the inherent concepts that come from our minds. But rather, I think that we could have learned the details of those space-time concepts from our experience or, what's even more likely, that we could have acquired them through our education."

"So if that's true, then what were our original concepts? What concepts of space and time are inherent in our minds?"

“I don’t know that we have any inherent concepts of any type in that area. And in fact, I don’t know that those concepts are originally produced by our minds at all.”

“No? Well then where do they come from if not from our minds?”

“I didn’t say that they don’t come from our minds. I just said that our minds don’t produce them. And what I mean by this is that they aren’t created by us directly or intentionally. What I mean is that they’re nothing more than the accidental by-products of an even more basic *a priori* intuition of our minds.”

“A more basic intuition?... Did you talk about this before or are you just making it up?”

“I’m talking about what we were just discussing upstairs, about our minds adopting a perspective. Because the true intuitive act of the mind is the act of adopting a self-perspective, and the concepts of space and time that we end up adopting in that process are merely those that go along with the particular self-perspective we’ve adopted. So as I was just saying, this means that space-time is more a by-product than a direct intuition of the mind.”

“And the details of those concepts...”

“The details can be filled in later, and they can change as our self-concept changes. And it just happens that the self-concept we associate with the normal human perspective, with the perspective we could call conventional- or consensus-reality, is the very same self-concept that is accompanied by three-dimensional space and linear time.” Smitty sat back and smiled proudly at what he seemed to consider a very convincing conclusion to this area of discussion, and as Gary was at a bit of a loss as to how to continue, the two of them now fell into silence.

But their silence was soon broken by the arrival of Leonard and the Steward at their table. Leonard advanced cautiously and placed a plate of pork chops in front of Gary before quickly retreating to the relative safety of the pantry. And as he did so, the Steward spoke. “Here you go, Sparks. One order. That’s all you get!”

“But the other order isn’t for me, it’s for Mr. Smith,” Gary protested.

“I don’t care who it’s for. You only get one order!”

“But Mr. Smith...”

“Don’t worry about me, Gary,” Smitty interrupted him. “I’m really not hungry.”

“But you ordered a meal. You ordered...”

“Don’t worry about it. Just forget it and eat your pork chops.”

“Are you sure?” And when Smitty nodded yes, Gary turned to the Steward. “Okay then, one order will be fine.”

The Steward wasn't quite sure what to make of Gary's one-sided conversation with the empty chair, but based upon this last response, he had a growing feeling that the problem had somehow been resolved. "Okay, good. As long as we got that straight..." And upon seeing the mild and cooperative expression on Gary's face, he felt even more convinced that there would be no further trouble. And so he began slowly backing away from the table, trying not to turn and let Gary see the butcher knife he had hidden behind his back.

But then just as he was nearing the door, Gary called out to him. "Oh, say! You forgot my peas and corn."

"Right, peas and corn. It's on its way." And as Gary now turned his attention to the pork chops, the Steward spun and walked out the door, glancing into the pantry as he passed to make sure that Leonard had heard the order.

The Steward's departure was the signal to the rest of those present in the saloon that the crisis had passed, and now the Captain and the Engineers rose to leave the room. Walking with a forced nonchalance, the Captain passed so close to Gary's table that he nearly brushed Smitty's hair with his arm as he went by. And upon seeing that the Cadets were still seated and awaiting Act Two, the Captain shot them a stern glance, a glance whose significance was immediately clear to them. And so reluctantly, the two of them also got up and followed the others out the door.

Gary and Smitty were now alone in the saloon, with the exception of Leonard who was still in the pantry waiting for the galley to send up Gary's vegetables. And seeing that there would be no further interruptions, Gary pushed his unfinished pork chops aside and began to speak. "So let's see now, what were we talking about?"

Just as Gary was asking this question, Leonard came in with two small vegetable dishes in his hands. But as soon as he entered and saw that everyone else had left—as soon as he saw that he was alone with the crazy man!—he was seized with such a panic that he immediately threw up his arms and ran for the nearest exit, the vegetable dishes crashing to the deck in his wake.

Oblivious to Leonard's dramatic exit, Smitty responded to Gary's question. "Well, right now we could go into more details about the relationship between space-time and mind, or on the other hand, we could talk about what modern physics has to say about the universality of three-dimensional space and linear time."

Physics! Did he just say physics? "Why don't we talk about that second one?" Gary said with thinly disguised enthusiasm.

"You know, somehow I thought you'd pick that option," Smitty said jestingly. But then quickly switching tones, he got right down to business. "Well, first off I should remind you that I consider space and time to be the most basic concepts we have about the physical world, far more basic than the ideas of objectivity or determinism or the possibility of a neutral observer or anything else that we discussed up in your room. I think they're the concepts with which we should concern ourselves first and foremost. And I also think that if we're going to talk about

any of the doubts that quantum mechanics has raised about the physical world, it's the doubts about three-dimensional space and linear time that we should deal with before anything else."

"So you want to talk about the things that quantum mechanics has proven about space and time?"

"Proven? There you go using that word again. Now let me warn you right here that the things we're about to discuss aren't going to prove anything at all about the true nature or dimensions of space and time. Let me warn you that all they're going to do is to raise doubts about what those true natures may be, or even about whether or not any such thing as true natures can be said to exist."

"Oh yeah, so you're going to start this whole thing off on this blatantly hypocritical note?" Gary wasn't angry when he said it, but rather he said it as a sort of counter-warning to Smitty.

"Hypocritical...?"

"Yes, I'm talking about the way you're always saying that anything I bring up can't be proven, while when it comes to one of your ideas, you turn right around and say that it *can* be proven. Why, you even claim that you've actually proven the existence of that so-called mind-dimension of yours. Now if that's not hypocritical, then I don't know what is."

"You say that's hypocritical?... You mean you still haven't accepted my proof?..." Smitty wasn't quite ready to re-open that area of discussion at the moment, so instead he did what he could to lead the conversation away from it. "Well, if you'd rather discuss my so-called hypocrisy than modern physics, then let's go right ahead..."

"No, wait a minute! I didn't say that. I didn't say I wanted to go back into that... All I was doing was bringing it up. All I was doing was mentioning it in the same way you were talking about proving things... I just... That was all I had to say about it." Gary feared that he'd nearly let an opportunity to discuss physics slip away from him, and so it was in a somewhat chastened tone that he now offered a near-apology. "So don't worry about it, I won't bring it up again."

"Right," said Smitty, accepting the apology without comment. "So what were we just talking about? Wasn't it modern physics and the things it has to say about space-time?"

"Yes, that's right. Like for instance, look at the way that string theory and other advanced areas of physics have long given up on the validity of three-dimensional space. Look at the way they're always having to add new space dimensions, the way they've had to use ten and even more dimensions in order to make their equations come out right. Because adding those dimensions was the only way they could come up with the right answers when dealing with quantum events."

Gary had jumped into the subject before it could get away from him, and now he was on a roll. And though he paused for a second right here, he didn't wait nearly long enough to allow Smitty time to change the subject. "And then look at how three-dimensional space also breaks

down mathematically when dealing with probability waves. And since many scientists now believe that probability waves are the things that truly inhabit micro-space rather than particles or matter, I think we should consider this breakdown of three-dimensional space to be of particular importance.

“As you may know with probability waves, they don’t exist within three dimensions at all, but rather they actually exist in three dimensions per possible outcome. And this means that when dealing with a probability wave that could yield three possible results from an observation, that wave has been shown to exist in a nine-dimensional space, a space within which it exists right up until the moment we perform an experiment to measure it. And it’s only at this point when the measurement is made that the nine-dimensional probability wave collapses into a three-dimensional object or event, a three-dimensional reality that is compatible with our conventional reality.”

Gary paused briefly once again, and then as he screwed up his courage, he decided to go ahead and use the forbidden word. “So surely all this must prove something, the fact that all those multi-dimensional formulas actually work.”

“Prove? I don’t know that they prove anything beyond the fact that there are some very clever mathematicians around. I don’t know that they prove anything at all about the physical world.”

“Clever mathematicians!?” Gary found the use of that trite phrase offensive. “Is that the only answer you can come up with for the fact that those formulas always work out, for the fact that they always yield the correct answers?”

“Well, yes...” Smitty was in no particular hurry for a showdown on this subject, and so now he did his best to change the subject. “So tell me, what do you have to say about Bell’s Theorem? What do you think it proves about the physical world?”

“Bell’s Theorem? The old one about the paired particles? The one that so many different people have jumped onto and tried to use to prove whatever it was that they wanted to prove?”

“Yes, that’s right. Now tell me what it is that you think it proves.”

“No, this time you tell me.” Gary thought he smelled the approach of an opportunity to catch Smitty in an act of open hypocrisy. “What does it prove to you? Are you one of those who say it proves the existence of faster-than-light movement or communication? Or are you one of those New Age types who say it proves the existence of consciousness? Tell me, which one are you?”

“Well, as I said before, I don’t think it proves anything at all. I just think it raises some serious questions about our most basic laws of space and time. I think it casts serious doubts on the absolute nature of those laws. And in this case, I think it casts doubts that even your clever mathematicians haven’t been able to overcome.”

There he was with that irritating tone of his again. And what the hell was that gratuitous “your clever mathematicians” comment all about? Did he really have to throw that in? Gary was

truly offended now, and so in an act of retaliation, he decided to ignore the guy for awhile and concentrate instead on eating his pork chops.

It didn't take Smitty long to realize that he was being given the silent treatment, and in response he set out to draw Gary back into the conversation. "Have you ever considered the possibility that rather than raising questions about faster-than-light communication or about consciousness, Bell's Theorem may actually raise serious questions about what we even mean by the phrase spatial dimensions? Have you ever considered that?"

As Gary sawed off a leathery piece of pork chop and put it into his mouth without saying a word, Smitty went on with his thought. "Because maybe the dimensions of space are even more complex than those of the nine-dimensional probability wave or those of ten- or twenty-dimensional string theory. Maybe they're so complex that there's actually a dimension within which those two particles are still connected to each other in spite of the fact that they may be separated by thousands of miles."

"Ha!" It was Gary's only response to this idea, but to Smitty it was much better than no response at all.

"Well, what I mean is that we don't know all the complexities of space. We have no idea what space is really like, and we never will. And though I'll admit right here and now that scientists have had some amazing success with their mathematical constructions of space..."

"Damn right they've had success!"

Smitty had paused intentionally, and now he was encouraged by what he heard. "But in spite of all their success, what have they really proven? Have they proven that space is nine- or ten-dimensional, or that it has any set number of dimensions at all? Have they proven anything about the true nature or the true dimensions of space? Have they even proven that there's any such thing as an absolutely correct space and time, a space and time that can be said to exist in an absolute sense, either independently of us or dependently upon us? Now I ask you in all seriousness: Can you really say that any of those things have been proven beyond a reasonable doubt?"

Gary wanted to say something to defend the dignity of science. He wanted to say something to make that goddamned know-it-all take back everything he'd just said. But at the moment, he found himself faced with a major problem, and that was the fact that he really had no strong or compelling arguments he could use in refutation of Smitty's point. He had no way to shoot this guy down. And so as he shoved his half-eaten pork chops aside, he finally fell back upon what he saw as the only course of argument that still lay open to him. "Hypocrite!"

"What...?" Smitty hadn't expected this answer to his question.

"Yeah, hypocrite! Cause you're always saying that I can't prove my ideas. But yours? Oh yeah, of course they're all proven!"

"Do you want to know...?"

“That’s right, my stuff’s all speculation and conjecture, but yours is proven beyond a doubt.”

“Do you want to know what the difference is between...?”

“Yeah, yeah, your stuff’s different! Of course it is. Your phony mind-dimension is real, but my cold, hard science is wrong.”

“Please let me speak! Please let me give you an answer...”

“Why, so you can rationalize your hypocrisy? So you can make excuses for it and then turn right around after that and make more of your pronouncements from on high?”

“No, it’s nothing like that. Please believe me. The only thing I want to do is to explain the situation, to explain the difference between the things that you and the physicists have set out to prove and the things that I try to prove. Because I can assure you that there’s a big difference between the two.”

“Yeah, and what’s that?” Gary was a bit calmer now after having vented, but he was still on his guard.

“It’s the simple fact that whenever you set out to prove things, they’re always things that have to do with the real world. They’re things that have to do with the true nature of space and time, with the true dimensions of our underlying physical reality. But on the other hand, when I set out to prove things, all I deal with is the subjective world. I never have anything to do with the real world.”

“The subjective world and the real world? What’s all that supposed to mean?”

Smitty now saw his opening, his chance to pronounce from on high, and of course he took it. “You see, it’s this way. The real world—the world of things as they really exist, the world of direct, objective experience—is a world that we can never know anything about. It’s a world that’s completely inaccessible to us and one that may or may not even exist. It’s a world that can never be anything more than hypothetical. And that’s because our actual world, the world in which we live, is the subjective world.

“You see, the world of our experience, the world we know, isn’t one of direct contact with the real world, but rather it’s a world of interpretations. It’s a world made up of the subjective interpretations we make of those contacts which may or may not have actually taken place, contacts with a real world which may or may not actually exist. But it’s the only world that truly exists for us, this world confined within the human perspective, and so it’s the only world we can ever truly know or explore. It’s the only world we can discuss without entering into the area of metaphysics.”

“But its relationship to the real world...”

“That’s something we can never know. And it’s for that reason that when I talk about space-time-mind, I’m not talking about their true nature at all. I’m not talking about how they

exist or don't exist within the real world. All I'm talking about is the space-time-mind of our subjective world, of this little world of ours that we've been taught to call the 'Real World.'"

"And you say that all the ideas you've brought up so far have only been ideas about this subjective world?"

"That's right, because it's the only world about which we can ever know anything with any degree of certainty."

"But isn't that awfully limited? That little world as you yourself call it."

"Yes and no, because though it may appear small at first glance, you'd be surprised at just how far you can go once you begin actually exploring the dimensions of this subjective space-time-mind."

"Hmm..." Gary was already beginning to lose interest at the direction the conversation was taking, and the only answer he could muster for Smitty at this point was a grunt. And at the same time, he now turned his attention back to his plate of pork chops.

Smitty saw that the dialogue was in serious danger of grinding to a halt, and this right at the moment when he himself was just getting wound up. So knowing that he had to do something to regain Gary's attention, knowing that he had to dangle some enticement out there that would rekindle Gary's interest, he knew that his only choice was to ask a question right now, a question that made some reference to physics. "Have you ever stopped to consider why it is that physicists have always said that we live in three-dimensional space?"

"Three-dimensional...? I don't know. That's just the way it is, I guess." And for the moment, the pork chops were forgotten.

"Is it really? I mean, when you're dealing with the great emptiness of space, an emptiness that could conceivably be interpreted as having four dimensions or seven or any other number you could name, why do you suppose we've always insisted upon three and only three?"

"I don't know..."

"Do you think that maybe it has something to do with an attempt to make it conform to the three great dimensions of existence, the dimensions of space, time and mind? Or then again, do you think maybe it's an attempt to make it conform to three-dimensional time?"

"Three-dimensional time? But I thought you always called it linear time." Gary asked this question in spite of the fact that his interest was rapidly waning. In spite of the fact that his mind was wandering more and more back toward the pork chops.

"I do, and I admit that it's a misleading expression to call it that since the system of time within which we live actually consists of three very distinct and well-defined dimensions, the dimensions of past, present and future. And by calling it linear, we tend to create a mistaken impression of the present in which it appears to be nothing more than a point on the line of time,

a point lying between past and future. But in reality, the present is more than that. It's so very much more."

By now it was quite clear to Gary that Smitty's earlier question hadn't signaled a return to the subject of physics at all. It was clear that it had been nothing more than a ruse to draw him back into the conversation. So now as Smitty paused for a moment, Gary felt that he no longer had any obligation whatsoever to contribute a thing.

Smitty could see from Gary's attitude that he was now on his own, so he did what he could to keep the conversation alive by himself. "Yes, the present is the great dynamic dimension. It's the one within which we actually live and think. And in many ways, it's the only one that we could call real. It's the only one that's right here in front of us rather than being a projection into one direction or another, a projection into memory or a projection into possibility."

Smitty paused and looked for some reaction to this statement, but all he saw was Gary picking away at his pork chops. "And have you ever stopped to consider the possibility that three-dimensional space and three-dimensional time are attempts to make each of these great dimensions conform to our other great dimension, to our three-dimensional mind?"

"Three-dimensional mind?" Gary said it with very little enthusiasm, but Smitty was encouraged in that at least he said something.

"Yes, our mind-dimension consists of the three dimensions that I hinted at earlier when we were up in your room. Do you remember? I mean the dimensions of self, other and interaction. Or if you'd rather use grammatical terms, you could say that it consists of the three components of a simple sentence: subject, object and verb.

"You see, all our mental activity, all the thinking of any type that takes place within our human perspective, occurs within those three dimensions. And it's through the simple act of adopting a perspective that we automatically create the definition for each dimension. Because by choosing a self-identity, we not only define the subject-dimension of our minds, but we also determine the object-dimension which consists of everything else that wasn't included within the subject-dimension. And at the same time, we also delimit the verb-dimension by defining the area within which the interaction can take place, this being that area where the subject and object come into contact."

As Smitty's brief pause was met with silence and indifference, he continued to trudge onward. "In all our thinking, there's always a thinker, an object of thought and the action of thinking. Always that and nothing more. And even in moments of introspection, it's not a case of the thinker reflecting upon himself, but rather it's a case of the thinker reflecting upon an image of himself, reflecting upon a self-image that he's created and that has nothing to do with his thinking self. So you see, it's always just the three. No more and no less."

"Just the three?" And Gary suddenly pushed the pork chops aside in an abrupt return to life. At the same time, he sat up straight in his chair, preparing to spring upon a perceived weakness in Smitty's system. A weak spot that had just appeared to him.

“Yes, that’s right. Just the three.”

“Well how about when there are more than two people involved in a thought? Doesn’t that create a situation with more than three dimensions?”

“You mean like when three people are holding a conversation together? Is that what you’re referring to?”

“No, I mean like when two people are talking or doing something together and a third person is observing them. So the person who’s observing has not only his own dimension of observation but also the dimension of the interaction that’s taking place between the other two. And all those taken together must make more than three dimensions, don’t they?”

“Not really, because from the observer’s perspective, the verb-dimension is the act of observing, and everything he sees falls within the object-dimension.”

“But what about the other two people’s thoughts and actions? What about their subject- and object-dimensions?”

“Their dimensions fall within each of their own perspectives. They fall within each person’s own mind-dimension and they have nothing whatsoever to do with the mind-dimension of the observer. Each of the three has his own perspective, his own private three-dimensional mind, and there’s no overflow from any one into the others.”

“But... Oh, you’re impossible! You think you have an answer for everything, don’t you?”

“I try to.” And Smitty’s face broke out in that insufferably smug grin of his, that grin that always grated so badly upon Gary’s nerves. And though Smitty was well aware of just how irritating this smile of his could be, still he couldn’t help himself at this moment since he felt far too much self-satisfaction to be able to feign any sort of false humility. He felt that he’d completely demolished all the objections Gary had been able to throw at him. He felt that he’d proven his system beyond all doubt. And so though it went against his better judgment to do so, he just had to rub it in a little bit.

As he did so, he braced himself and prepared to meet the explosion of outrage that seemed so sure to follow. But now to his great surprise, he found that his statement and his triumphal smile weren’t met with the impassioned arguments and the yelling and the name-calling that previous experience had taught him to expect. No, they were met with a reaction that was the exact opposite. They were met with what appeared to be a complete mental and emotional surrender as Gary’s only response was a docile smile and a gentle nodding of the head.

Smitty didn’t know what to make of this reaction on Gary’s part, this reaction that was so unlike anything he’d ever seen before. But then all at once, he had an idea, and he decided to give the waters a little test. “So what do you think about my system? My system of nine-dimensional subjective reality? My system of three great dimensions which are each subdivided into three dimensions?”

“Wow, that’s really something,” said Gary placidly.

And with this calm and cooperative reply proving that his test had been a success, Smitty now knew that he could take advantage of Gary’s current submissive mood to push their dialogue far beyond anywhere the two of them had ever been before, far beyond any of their previous boundaries. And it was with growing confidence that he plunged right into the subject head-first. “You see, everything we see and do and think and feel takes place within these nine dimensions, and every one of those things involves all three of the great dimensions in one way or another. Why, even the simplest perception involves all three great dimensions since it requires not only the perception itself within the space-dimension, but it also requires interpretation within the mind-dimension, an interpretation which makes use of the time-dimension in order to orient the thing or the event within a past-present-future continuum. And at the same time, even the simplest action requires our acting within all three of the great dimensions, not only the physical one but also the mental one where we plan the action using our awareness of time to project the consequences of that action—or of inaction.

“So you see, every time we see or hear or feel anything at all, and also every time that we act or react, we do so within our subjective space-time-mind. We live, and we feel and act, within those nine dimensions.”

“Yes, I see. I certainly do see.”

Gary had reacted appropriately to this pause, so Smitty continued to push ahead. “But you may ask me: What about things that don’t involve physical space? Don’t those things exist independently of the space-dimension? Like what about a memory? It doesn’t exist within space, does it?

“Well now, that’s a good question.” It had to be a good one since Smitty himself was the one who’d just asked it. “And the explanation lies in the fact that in my system, I treat memories as perceptions across the time-dimension. This means that just like in the case of physical perceptions, these perceptions into the past-dimension of time require that we interpret them within the mind-dimension. And at the same time, they also involve some idea of space, some sense of space. They involve a sense of orientation within what I call memory-space, this being a type of space that is related to our visions of past physical space.”

“Huh, so that’s the answer.”

Gary’s words were gentle and cooperative, but maybe they were just a bit too cooperative for Smitty’s tastes. Maybe he needed to do something to draw the real Gary back out a little. “So is that how you see memories, as perceptions across time? Or do you see them as something we store up somewhere or other?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I guess...”

“You guess what? You guess you do?”

“I guess... I don’t know... Whichever...”

“You know, most people see memories as something that we store up in our brains. But in order to see them in that way, I think you must first make an unwarranted assumption, a blatantly metaphysical assumption that the past is somehow real and that it consists of real events that can be stored away. You must assume the absolute existence of the past, which is something that can never be proven. But in my system, on the other hand, you’re not required to make any such metaphysical assumptions.”

As Gary’s only response to this was to nod in silent agreement, Smitty now did his best to breathe some life back into the conversation. “But what about all the research on the brain that scientists have done? you may ask. What about the way that scientists have already identified the areas of the brain in which our memories are stored? What about that?”

“Well, my answer is this: Has their research shown that there’s anything actually stored in the brain, or rather has it simply identified the areas of the brain that control our perceptions across the time-dimension?”

Gary continued to nod and say nothing until he finally noticed that Smitty was waiting for him to speak, at which point he said calmly, “That certainly is a good question.”

“Yes, well... Nothing I’ve said is incompatible in any way with the research that’s been done on the brain. And at the same time that it avoids the metaphysical assumptions required by the memory-storage version, my system can also be seen to be more compatible with certain other types of evidence that I could present to you. Far more compatible than the storage version is.

“And what type of evidence is that? you may ask.” In fact, Smitty wished wholeheartedly that Gary had asked it. He wished that he would begin to play his assigned role in what was supposed to be a dialogue. “Well, what I’m referring to is the way that memories become fuzzy with distance in exactly the same way that physical perceptions do. And then in the case of the exception-that-proves-the-rule, you sometimes get distant memories that become crystal clear. But the thing is that when they do so, they become clear in a mirage-like way in which the details and even some basic aspects of the memory come more from the imagination than they do from past experience.

“Now I ask you, what sort of memory-storage explanation involving deteriorating brain cells or faulty wiring in the brain could possibly explain these phenomena better than my system of perceptions across time? Can you come up with any?”

Gary couldn’t, of course, not in his present state. And the only answer he could give to these questions was a mild, “You’re right.”

This guy was starting to get on Smitty’s nerves with this passive attitude of his. Why couldn’t he participate in the conversation like he was supposed to? Why couldn’t he turn it into a true dialogue—like back in the old days, like back... there and then? Why couldn’t this guy strike a happy medium between name-calling aggression and this idiot-like passivity?

“Well, if you have no more questions about memory,” Smitty began sarcastically, “then why don’t we move right on? Why don’t we move on to the question of thought itself, the

question of how I define thought in my system? Well, the answer is that I see thought as being perception across the mind-dimension in very much the same way that memory is perception across the time-dimension. And being a perception, it involves all three of the great dimensions. It involves our perception of an idea across mind, one that we orient and organize temporally through the use of our time-perception or what we call our memory. And at the same time it can be said to take place within a sort of intellectual-space which is somewhat related to the memory-space I mentioned earlier.”

Smitty paused here in the vain hope of receiving some intelligent response to what he’d just said, but upon seeing the stupid half-grin on Gary’s face, he didn’t wait very long. “Now, you may dispute the existence of this intellectual-space, but perhaps I can explain it to you in a way that will allay your objections. Because when I talk about this type of space, what I mean is that throughout all our intellectual processes, we always maintain an awareness of space and an orientation in space. I mean that even when we’re thinking on the most abstract levels possible, we still maintain an awareness of a self that is spatially separated from the rest of the world, a self that is separated from the ideas it is thinking about.

“And the only time this intellectual-space ever disappears altogether is when we reach the level of pure mysticism, the level of pure at-one-ness with the universe. But at that level, all the other dimensions disappear as well, not only that of space but also those of time and mind. This level is so far removed from our normal perspective, though, that I see no real point in going into it right now, do you?”

Smitty paused as though he expected an answer, but the truth was that by now he knew better than to expect anything at all from Gary. So in actuality, he was merely pausing to organize his thoughts as he prepared to move on. “So you see, to think is to perceive an idea across the mind-dimension, and even in the case of something that comes to us from across the space- or time-dimensions, we never think directly about that object or that event within those other dimensions. Because the first thing our minds do upon perceiving something is to name it, to turn it into an idea, and then after that, any further mental manipulation that takes place is nothing more than the manipulation of the idea. It’s a manipulation that occurs within the mind-dimension and within intellectual-space-time. It’s a processing or a perceiving of the idea through those dimensions or through what I like to call the structures of our minds.

“Structures of our minds? What structures are you talking about?” Smitty was getting so desperate for someone to serve as a partner in dialogue that now he was beginning to play the other role himself.

“When I talk about the structures of our minds, what I’m talking about is the fine shapes or subtle dimensions within our mind-dimensions, in contrast to the three large dimensions of subject, object and verb which I discussed earlier. I’m talking about the more subtle aspects of our perspectives, the subtle dimensions of our self-identities. I’m talking about what you could call our adjective-dimensions.

“Adjective-dimensions? What could those be?”

“Adjective-dimension is the term I use for all the adjectives that go into our self-identities, all those sub-conscious qualifiers that we constantly apply to ourselves. And when I say this I’m referring not only to those adjectives that describe our national and racial self-identities or our sexual self-identities or our religious self-identities, but I’m also referring to all those adjectives that we’ve accumulated throughout our self-histories, all the concepts and beliefs that have become a part of us through our experiences with the world.

“All those together make up the structures of our minds? Wow, that’s quite a system you have there.” Smitty was starting to get a bit carried away with the role he was playing.

“Yes, and when we think about an idea, what we’re doing is we’re perceiving it through those mental structures. We’re filtering it through the structures created by all those self-images and concepts and beliefs that we hold. We’re filtering it through everything that we’ve ever been taught or ever learned from experience, everything that has ever made such a strong and lasting impression upon us as to become an integral part of our minds. Everything that has ever become deeply enough engrained within the structures of our minds as to influence our thoughts, to color them and even to distort them.

“But aren’t you talking about emotions here? Aren’t you talking about the way our emotions can color our thoughts?

“Yes and no, because when you talk about emotions, you’re talking about involuntary physical reactions to the things we see and hear and think. You’re talking about reactions by our involuntary organs such as our hearts or our stomachs. And the thing that you have to understand about these reactions is that they’re an effect rather than a cause. They’re an effect of the very same mental structures that color our thoughts, and all they do is to amplify and intensify that coloration. They don’t create any distortion by themselves. They only contribute to a distortion that’s already there.

“Wow, you sure are smart, aren’t you? You have an answer for everything.” Smitty was getting completely carried away with the role he was playing.

“Thank you, I do my best. And as I’m sure you’re well aware, I’ve worked very long and very hard to arrive at the point where I am today. I’ve put a huge amount of hard intellectual work into these ideas, so it’s very reassuring to me now to hear that all that work has paid off.” Oh jeez, was this guy going to spend the rest of the evening patting himself on the back or what? And where was Gary now that Smitty was so badly in need of being shot down? “So thank you very much for your comments. I’ll take them to heart.

“But now back to my system. Back to the mental structures that we were just discussing. Perhaps I should tell you here that one of my favorite ways to picture those structures made of beliefs and concepts is to look at them as stars or planets located within the outer space of our minds, stars whose gravitational pull causes a curvature of the mental space around them so that any ideas which pass nearby are deflected to a greater or lesser extent. Any ideas which pass near them have their courses affected, and perhaps they even have their shapes modified.

“Of course this isn’t the only way that you can view mental structures. There are many other ways to picture them such as the one that I’m sure you would like, the one that sees them

simply as reflections of the structures of the brain. But as for myself, I find that particular vision to be very misleading since it tends to reinforce the belief that so many of you seem to share, the belief that our entire mental world, with all its complexity and all its profundity, is nothing more than the accidental by-product of a piece of hamburger.” It was hard to tell why Smitty chose to say this right at this point or even to tell who exactly he was trying to offend with that arrogant tone of his, because at the moment he was arguing solely with himself. “So please don’t ever bring it up again.

“Instead, let’s just discuss what’s important. And what’s important isn’t by any means the way we choose to picture our mental structures, but rather it’s our being able to understand the effects that the existence of those structures has. It’s understanding the exact way in which those structures—those beliefs and those concepts—control and distort our thinking. Because you have to realize that it’s the beliefs themselves that cause the distortions, and not only that, but they do so in a way that’s automatic and completely involuntary. What I mean by this is that it’s never a case of us reading things into our thoughts, but rather it’s always a case of us perceiving those thoughts in exactly the way they appear to someone with our own particular mental structures. It’s never a case of the thinker distorting ideas, but rather it’s always the fault of the beliefs themselves. It’s always a case of the thinker being a prisoner of his own beliefs.

“And you can see this distortion very clearly in the most extreme case, in the case of the so-called true believer. When you see it, though, you should realize that it’s not a case of this person intentionally or actively bending his thoughts and his perceptions in order to make them conform to that central belief of his, but rather you should see that it’s the belief itself that is doing the bending. All he’s doing is seeing things exactly as they are from the perspective of someone who has this highly dominant and deep-seated belief.

“Wow, that’s very generous on your part, saying that it’s the beliefs and not the person who is at fault.

“I didn’t say that anyone or anything was at fault, did I? And I didn’t say that there was anything wrong with seeing things in this way, either. I just... Let me get back to my train of thought. Let me get back to this idea about the involuntariness of our mental distortions. And in the same vein, let me mention right here the way our beliefs also distort our memories and the way that when we change those beliefs, we simultaneously rewrite our histories, both our personal and our collective histories. And this is because of the way that when the structure of our present beliefs changes, it changes the entire way we see and remember the past. And it does so automatically, without our even being aware of the fact that we’re reinventing and reinterpreting the past. The fact that we’re rewriting it in a manner that goes far beyond anything that could be called selective memory.

“But enough about that. It’s an area that could take up one of our entire sessions, and as the hour is now getting late and supertime is over, perhaps I should get right down to the main point I want to make. And that point is simply to say that because of the way our minds are structured, there can never be any such thing as an unbiased perspective. There can never be any such thing as a true and objective perspective since all the perspectives available to us are subjective ones, and so we can never learn to think in a way that is absolutely true and correct. And in fact, even if someday we should manage to achieve enlightenment, the only thing it

would do would be to enable us to see things as they appear to the enlightened. It wouldn't do anything else beyond that.

"So it's meaningless for us to talk about correct or incorrect perspectives, though actually there might be some point in making a distinction between wider and narrower perspectives. And while it should be obvious from everything I've said up until now that I prefer the wider perspective for myself," Smitty bragged, "I know that the contents of this perspective are no more valid than those of a narrower perspective. The only difference between the two is the range of thought that each of them allows.

"And so as I see it, the best thing to do is to adopt a flexible perspective, one that treats our self-identities more as loosely held theories than as firmly held beliefs. One that places less severe restrictions upon our thought and one that allows us to go out and examine important questions from a wide variety of perspectives and then turn around and correlate the results.

"And while it would be impossible for us ever to think without using concepts of some sort, we must always remain aware of the dangers that these concepts and these systems of thought represent. Why, there's even a danger that someday I myself may actually come to treat my system as something real and solid, my system of nine-dimensional subjective reality and of mental activity as perception within these dimensions. I may actually come to take this system seriously at which point I would severely limit my further ability to think. Yes, there's a danger that someday I may actually come to believe in my own system." And Smitty said this last with a proud smile on his face, a smile that clearly revealed just how great a pride he took in this humility of his.

Smitty had now concluded his discourse, and he was just getting ready to stand up and leave when suddenly Gary was struck by a thought, a thought that immediately shook him out of the stupor he'd been in, a thought that he felt compelled to voice. "Didn't you just say that no perspective is more correct than any other?"

"Huh...?" Smitty was surprised at the way this bi-polar nut-case seated across from him had suddenly sprung back to life, and it took him a moment to recover from the shock. "Yes, that's right. That's what I said."

"And that means that the contents of any perspective are just as valid as those of any other?"

"I suppose so..."

"So then how can you say that a flexible perspective is better than a more rigid one if it's no more correct and its contents are no more valid? Because when you say that it's better, it seems to imply that it's somehow more correct." Gary was moving in for the kill.

"No, of course it's not more correct. It's just... It's better, that's all."

"And why is that?"

"Because it's... It's... It's more flexible, that's why."

“And that makes it better?”

“Hey, look at what time it is! It’s way past time for us to get out of here. We should have been gone twenty minutes ago. Man, Leonard’s gonna get pissed off at us for this.” And without giving Gary a chance to say a thing, Smitty got to his feet and began to leave.

Gary stood up and followed him out of the room, and he did so slowly and triumphally. He did so with the air of a victor savoring the sweet taste of victory. Because today for the first time ever, Gary had managed to stump Smitty. He had managed to ask him a question that Smitty couldn’t answer without contradicting himself. And so ignoring everything that had gone on before that last exchange, Gary felt that this final note had made him the clear winner of today’s debate.

As they entered the passageway leading to the stairs, Gary caught sight of Leonard ducking into the small, unused passengers’ lounge, and as he passed the lounge, he stuck his head inside to apologize for having stayed so long at the supper table. But Leonard didn’t answer his apology. Leonard did nothing at all but cringe in the corner of the lounge and watch with the look of a trapped animal in his eyes.

Gary saw that the guy was frightened out of his wits, and so sensing what the cause of that fear might be, he decided to do what he could to reassure the poor fellow. “Do you think there’s something wrong with people who talk to themselves? Is that what you think? Well let me tell you, we all talk to ourselves, and we do it all the time. It’s what we call thinking.”

GARY TZU

Gary stood in line with the rest of the passengers, but at the same time he stood out from those passengers. He was a man unlike the multitude of men, a man alone in a crowd. His demeanor was still and unmoved, with a deep placidity that gave the appearance of joy. His breathing was deep and silent, coming all the way from his heels. And his mind was in a state of pure simplicity, free from all thought and vacant of all purpose. For Gary was high. That's not to say that he was on drugs. No, far from it! Gary had no need to *get* high. Gary *was* high.

He moved forward as the line moved, just like any other passenger, but his reason for doing so had nothing to do with the mundane reasons of ordinary passengers. It had nothing to do with destination. For rather than preoccupying himself with such lowly questions as that of where exactly he might be going, he kept his attention fixed firmly on Destiny, whose mysterious call he faithfully followed. And so it was that he now found himself moving forward with this particular line, this line that Destiny had chosen. So it was that he moved forward until he arrived at the front of the line where the bus-driver spoke to him. "Your ticket, please."

Gary answered him with a beatific smile and continued on in the direction indicated by Destiny, in the direction of the bus, but no sooner had he taken a single step than he found his way blocked by the driver who had stepped into his path. "Your ticket!"

Gary calmly surveyed the situation and made a tentative move to walk around the driver, but the driver responded with a tentative move to cut him off. And so seeing that it was impossible for him to reach the bus without first confronting this individual, Gary quickly came to the realization that Destiny was telling him to speak with the man. "What is it?"

"Your ticket! You've gotta have a ticket if you wanna ride on this bus."

"A ticket?" Gary chuckled softly. "Oh Confucius, you're always so preoccupied with ritual."

"I'm sorry, but there's no confusion about it. Either you've got a ticket or you don't. And if you don't, you don't ride this bus."

Destiny had told Gary to speak with this individual, and now it was becoming quite clear to him what it was that he was supposed to say: He was supposed to admonish this fellow for the lowliness of his outlook. "You common, ignorant men are always so occupied with what lies within the common ways of the world. But I! I occupy myself with what lies outside those ways. I occupy myself with the formless condition of heaven and earth, and I seek my enjoyment in the business of doing nothing. So how can I address myself to your ceremonies when you have no understanding of..."

Gary's speech was abruptly interrupted by a sharp pain he felt in his ribs, and when he turned his head to see the source of that pain, he saw a short, dumpy, heavy-set woman holding a folded umbrella. And no sooner had he looked at her than the woman yelled at him, "Get the hell outa the way! There's people here wanna get on that bus."

Gary smiled calmly at her and began to turn back toward the driver, but when he received a fresh jab in the ribs from the woman's umbrella, at the same time hearing the big, deep-voiced man standing behind her say, "Yeah, asshole, get outta the way!" he was suddenly convinced that he heard a fresh call from Destiny. He heard a call that told him to leave this path and to head out in a brand new direction, in the direction of the main entrance to the bus station. And the call told him not to hesitate but to get out of there right now!

So ignoring the hostile stares being directed his way, Gary walked out of the station and started off down the street. He walked with his eyes fixed straight ahead, paying no attention to the other pedestrians or to anything else he passed, but keeping all his attention focused on Destiny. And though it would seem that by walking in this way he'd end up stumbling over every obstacle that came into his path, the fact was that Destiny warned him of those obstacles so that he was able to dodge them all without the least conscious effort to do so. And in this way he walked on, his attention firmly fixed on Destiny as he followed its mysterious call. He followed that call for several blocks down the street before following it around a corner to the left for two blocks, after which he followed it to the right for a block, then right again. He walked on and on, following the call of Destiny and making a whole series of right and left turns that led him all over town for more than an hour. And it wasn't until shortly after he'd passed in front of the bus-station for the fourth time that he finally heard a different call from Destiny, a call telling him to stop and look for someone to ask for directions out of town.

Gary knew that he couldn't ask just anyone, though. No, it had to be someone special, someone who was on a spiritual level as high as his own, someone who could offer him both directions and mystical insight. Someone... Aha! there he was, there was someone with the appearance of a wandering holy man.

Gary directed his steps over to the man that Destiny had chosen, a shabby-looking man who was hanging around in front of a bar, and as he approached, the man spoke to him. "Hey, buddy, can you spare any change?"

Oh, so this sage wants to discuss change, does he? "Change is the way of the world."

"What...?"

"All things are continually changing, but do we know what it is that maintains the process?" As Gary came closer and closer, the half-inebriated man began to retreat slowly up the sidewalk. He seemed to feel the need to maintain a certain distance between himself and this guy with the crazy, spaced-out smile who was walking toward him. "Changes endlessly follow one another, just like the four seasons. Yes, in just this same way, the changes we call life and death follow each other." The man began to retreat more rapidly now. He was becoming genuinely frightened at the way this nut-case was starting to talk to him about death while at the same time drawing ever nearer. "We all love life and fear death, but how do we know that the dead don't regret their ever having clung to life?"

The dead regret having clung to life!? That's it!! "Don't you come near me! You're crazy!" the man yelled, and he took off running up the street as fast as his wobbly legs could

carry him. Gary watched the man go and then shrugged his shoulders. It seemed that some people just couldn't face up to Truth.

He still needed to find someone to ask for directions, though, and as he looked around, he noticed that there were several passersby who had stopped to stare at him. He smiled pleasantly back at these people, but no sooner had he begun to make eye-contact with them than they turned one after the other and went hurriedly on their ways. No, none of these people was the right one to ask.

He walked down the street for several blocks, walking with his eyes straight ahead, when Destiny suddenly called his attention to a young black boy coming toward him. He looked at the boy and wondered to himself: Could this be the person to ask? Could this be the person who would offer him both directions and spiritual instruction? It seemed impossible, but it must be. After all, Destiny is never wrong.

"Do you know the way out of town?"

"You mean the freeway? I sure do. It's right down this street right here. You just go straight on down."

So he did know the way out of town, this strange, wise boy. Then go ahead and ask him about the government of mankind. "Now could you tell me how mankind should be governed?"

"Governed? What you talkin' about?"

"I'm asking you to explain to me what constitutes the correct governance of the world?"

"Oh, you talkin' bout the govament? Well, my mama always says that we just gotta get Jesse in there an' he'll fix up everything. That's what my mama says."

Jesse? Jesse? Gary wasn't familiar with that term, though when he thought about it, he realized that it had to be some black-people's expression for Not-Doing, for allowing all things to take their natural course. Yes, that must be what this wise boy means.

"Yes, Jesse. You're so right, my Heavenly Master." Gary bowed several times to the boy, who looked at him a bit bewildered before finally bowing back and continuing on his way. And once the young sage had gone, Gary began to walk in the direction indicated, in the direction of the freeway. He walked until he left the business district behind and continued on past several blocks of houses, finally coming to a shopping center sitting just off the freeway. And he would have continued on, right up the freeway on-ramp, too, if only Destiny hadn't suddenly called his attention to a building just across the street from the shopping center, a building of the type where people go to eat hamburgers.

He crossed the street and approached the building to see why Destiny had called him there, but he found nothing special about the building. He looked inside at the customers, at the fat lady with a table full of children and the three men in dirty work-clothes sitting by the window and the people lined up at the counter, but he saw nothing special about any of them.

Destiny must have had something else in mind when it called him to this building, and reflecting on this, he soon heard it telling him to go around to the back of the building.

He looked into the back window and surveyed the scene inside the kitchen, and it was there that he saw the man Destiny had wanted him to see. The man was standing before a large grill covered with hamburger patties, flipping the patties over one after the other, and no sooner had he finished doing this than he glided over to a counter where he laid out a row of hamburger buns. At this point, he covered the buns with lettuce and tomatoes and other ingredients, his movements smooth and effortless, and then he returned to the grill where, just as effortlessly, he picked up the patties and placed them on the buns. When this was done, he slid more patties onto the grill before wrapping the fresh-made hamburgers in paper, setting them on the serving counter, and going back to flip over the patties and begin the whole process once again. The man did all this so fluidly and with such a regular cadence that the sounds he produced reminded Gary of music, of some classical concerto. Obviously this man was a Master, Gary said to himself, one who had perfected the art of the hamburger.

Gary watched for some time, fascinated by the man's movements and mesmerized by the sound of the spatula on the grill as he flipped the patties. He watched and marveled as the man turned out tray after tray of hamburgers, and he only left his privileged vantage point when Destiny spoke to him and told him that he must go inside and address this man. He tried the back door and, finding that it wasn't locked, he walked in and approached the Master cook. "Tell me, what is the secret of your art?"

"Huh?" The cook turned to see who had spoken to him, then returned to producing hamburgers as he spoke. "Whatta you want?"

"I've come to ask you to teach me your art."

"Teach you what?"

"Your art. The art of the hamburger."

"Oh, you mean you're lookin' for a job? Well, don't talk to me about it. You gotta talk to the manager."

The manager? Who could that be? Perhaps an even greater Master than this cook. "And where is this manager? What must I do to see him?"

"He should be right out front there," the cook answered with his back to Gary, too absorbed in his work to turn around.

Noticing that the cook wasn't watching him, and at the same time being urged on by Destiny—and perhaps by his stomach as well—he reached down and picked up a freshly-made hamburger from the tray. But just as he was about to take a bite, he heard the manager yell, "What the hell are you doing in here?"

Gary hesitated, not sure whether to answer or to eat the hamburger, until his decision was made for him by the manager bounding into the kitchen and snatching the burger from his hands. "I came to ask this Master to teach me his art."

"The guy came here lookin' for a job," the cook interjected.

"Looking for a job or looking for a chance to steal a hamburger?"

"I wanted to ask..." Gary began meekly, but the manager cut him off.

"Listen, if you're looking for a job, you're looking in the wrong place. I wouldn't hire you after you tried to rip-off that hamburger. Now get the hell outa here before I call the police!"

Gary was a bit disconcerted by the unprovoked hostility coming from the manager, and he wondered what he could do to rectify the situation. He looked at the Master cook for support, but his entreaty was met with a cold, hard stare and so, his empty stomach growling as he cast one last longing look at the tray of hamburgers—"Get out now!"—he heard Destiny telling him to abandon his hamburger-making ambitions and continue on his way.

He walked looking straight ahead the way he always did, but for some reason he now walked more slowly than usual. And at the same time, his attention kept straying from Destiny over to visions of those huge trays of hamburgers. Yes, his attention wavered for the first time in a long time, for the first time in several days at least, but in spite of this wavering, he still had enough Will to follow Destiny as it called him over to the on-ramp and up onto the freeway. And the further he walked, the further he moved away from those hamburgers, the more his attention returned one-pointedly to Destiny.

He walked along the shoulder of the freeway as car after car after truck shot by a few feet away until, having gone a mile, two miles, a car pulled over onto the shoulder and its driver leaned toward him to ask him if he wanted a ride. Gary looked the car over for a moment with some distaste, and then he gave his answer. "You certainly have an ingenious machine there, one that makes travel both rapid and effortless. But I have always heard that where there are ingenious devices, there the pure simplicity of the mind is sure to be impaired. And where simplicity is impaired, the spirit becomes unsettled and thereby becomes an improper dwelling place for the Tao. No, I don't want a ride in your car. I prefer that my simplicity should remain unimpaired and my spirit remain settled."

The driver studied him curiously for a few seconds before saying, "Okay, suit yourself," and driving off. And as he did, Gary watched him go with a certain feeling of self-satisfaction at having retained his special relationship with the Tao. To himself, he sang the praises of his simplicity and his settled spirit, though there was a moment just after he resumed walking upon his now weary legs that his spirit became unsettled. A moment when his mind flashed upon the car's comfortable-looking seats. This unsettling of the spirit was only a passing phenomenon, though, and it wasn't long before he managed to return his attention wholly and completely to Destiny.

And so once again he walked along the shoulder of the freeway with his eyes fixed straight ahead, not even flinching when the wind from a truck hurtling by a few feet away would

hit him with a force that nearly knocked him down. He walked until, once again having gone a mile or two, a car pulled over onto the shoulder and stopped for him. But this time, the car that stopped wasn't an ordinary car. No, it wasn't ordinary at all, for it was painted a strange pattern of black-and-white while on its roof were several attachments that looked like lights. Gary wasn't sure just what type of car this could be, though he had a suspicion that it might be somehow connected with the government. And his suspicions were confirmed when a man wearing an official-looking uniform stepped out of the car and approached him.

"You know you can't walk on the freeway."

He couldn't? The statement seemed ridiculous to Gary, and he laughed slightly as he answered, "But I am."

The government-man's eyes hardened when he heard that reply, and he shot back, "Are you tryin' to be funny?"

"No, not at all. I just don't understand..."

"Oh, so you're from out of state?... and you didn't see the signs?"

Signs? Gary hadn't noticed any strange atmospheric phenomena or any other miraculous occurrences of any sort. So what could this fellow possibly be referring to? "No, I haven't seen any Signs."

"Bullshit!! If you didn't see those signs, either you're blind or you're a liar!"

The heat of the government-man's words surprised Gary, and while he fumbled around for a reply, the man continued speaking. "Now get the hell off this freeway before I take you downtown."

Oh, so that was it. Now he understood at last. Now he knew what the man really wanted: He wanted to take Gary downtown. He wanted to take him downtown and put him in charge of the government. And now that Gary had finally figured out the man's true aims, he knew exactly how he should respond. "Have you, my good man, ever seen a sacrificial ox? Dressed in fine robes and fed..."

"What are you talking about?"

"...but at the moment of the sacrifice, doesn't the ox wish it was once again an ordinary calf?"

"What...!? Listen, pal, I don't know what loony-bin you escaped from, but if you don't start walkin' toward that off-ramp over there right now, I'm takin' you in. You hear me?"

Gary was about to explain to the government-man that he preferred to remain undefiled, remain free to follow his own inclinations. And he might even have told him that he preferred to continue dragging his tail through the mud, along with several other anecdotes which he'd been saving up for use in refusing this long-anticipated offer of political power. But when he saw the

impatience with which the man threatened to press him into government service if he didn't get off the freeway immediately, he knew it would be a mistake to try to say any more. And so without even waiting to consult with Destiny, he turned and walked toward the off-ramp just as the man had ordered him to do. And it wasn't until he was already halfway down the ramp that he dared to look back, at which point he saw that the government-man had already driven off. Whew! he was safe, he told himself. He wouldn't have to take charge of the country.

Gary was out of danger now, but he was also unsure of what exactly he should do next. And even Destiny seemed indecisive. Even it seemed to be sending him mixed signals, telling him to return to the freeway at the same time it told him it would be a mistake to do so, and telling him to walk back toward town at the same time it told him there was nothing for him back there.

Gary spent several minutes trying to follow the bidding of Destiny, several minutes during which he kept walking up and down the on-ramp: starting on his way toward the freeway, then turning back and heading toward town before stopping and turning in the direction of the freeway once again. And it wasn't until after he'd done this dozens of times that Destiny finally gave up and told him to just give it a rest. It told him to sit down and take a break, and he immediately obeyed this most welcome advice. He sat on the ground halfway up the ramp and leaned his back against the No Pedestrians sign, and then he closed his eyes to meditate and to allow Destiny a chance to make up its gosh-darned mind.

He sat with his eyes closed for several minutes—or was it hours? He couldn't tell since time has no meaning when one is in a deep meditational state. He sat until he heard someone speak to him. “Hey, wake up.” Gary opened his eyes to see a pleasant-looking young man standing before him, while just behind the man was a slightly beat-up blue Volkswagen bug. He blinked his eyes several times and made an effort to refocus his mind upon this external reality.

“You musta been waitin’ here a long time to doze off like that.”

Doze off? You mean this poor, ignorant fellow thought that Gary had been asleep? You mean he didn't realize that Gary had been in a deep meditational state?

“I thought the motor of my car would wake you up, but I guess your snoring musta drowned it out. Boy, I never heard anyone snore as loud as you, and sittin’ up, too.”

Snoring! What an impertinent fellow. “What is it you want?” Gary asked with suppressed wrath.

“I was just lettin’ you know that you got a ride. I’m goin’ to the coast, be cuttin’ over up north, and you’re welcome to come along.”

Oh, so it's another person who wants to get him into one of those ingenious machines, huh? Gary would have to turn him down, of course, but before he did so, he wanted to get up and work the kinks out of his legs. And so he stood and walked over to the car, giving it a close examination while trying to think of the best way to explain to this fellow the importance of preserving his simplicity. He looked at the slightly dilapidated hood and fenders, and he approached the window and looked inside the car, but no sooner had he seen what was inside

than his planned explanation was suddenly and completely forgotten. It was drowned in the brilliance of the object that met his eyes. For sitting there on the passenger's seat was a bag, a bag of a type that he'd seen often enough in the past to know exactly what had to be inside. A bag whose contents he could picture in his mind, picture them so vividly that he could almost taste them: those delicious, mouth-watering hamburgers.

Gary stared and stared at the bag, and then without even realizing what he was doing, he found himself opening the door and getting into the car and placing the bag of hamburgers on his lap. The man said, "Go ahead and help yourself if you're hungry." But even before he'd spoken, Gary was already tearing the bag open and wolfing-down one of the burgers. And no sooner had Gary finished it than he was gulping down the coke and tearing into the second hamburger followed by the french fries.

"Boy, you sure were hungry," said the man, and Gary answered him with a loud burp.

Gary felt better now that he had something in his stomach, and he felt quite comfortable sitting in the car seat. But no sooner had he begun to lean back and relax than he started upright at the realization of what he was doing: He was riding in a car! He was endangering his simplicity!

He opened his mouth to tell the driver to stop and let him out, but he hesitated as the thought came to him of just how comfortable he was sitting there. He looked out the window at the countryside whizzing by, and he thought about how long it would have taken him to walk the distance he'd already come in just a few minutes in the car. He thought about the walk and about how tired his legs would have gotten, and about how hungry and thirsty he'd have become. And after that, he thought about his simplicity again and asked it a question that was forming in his mind: Simplicity, why do you make things so difficult?

Gary never got around to telling the driver to stop, and in fact, all thought of lost simplicity quickly vanished from his mind as he sat back and enjoyed the scenery passing outside his window. And the whole idea of simplicity, whether lost or preserved, had long since become a meaningless concept to him by the time the man finally spoke again. "Say, you never said how far you were going."

Going? How far? What a silly question. "My dwelling place is the limitless, that which lies outside the dust and dirt of the world."

"Oh, yeah?" The man glanced to see if this answer was meant as a joke, but the placid expression he saw on Gary's face told him nothing, so he proceeded with caution. "Limitless, huh? I guess that means you'll be going as far as I take you?"

Obviously! Gary wouldn't even dignify that question with an answer.

"Oh, by the way, my name's Al. What's yours?"

Name? This fellow wanted to know who he was? Well, Gary would tell him exactly who he was. "I, Gary, dreamed I was a butterfly, flying about as I pleased and enjoying myself. Then

I awoke, and I was Gary again. But now I wonder: was I then Gary dreaming I was a butterfly, or am I now a butterfly dreaming I'm Gary?"

Al glanced over at his passenger, then he glanced again and once again, but he couldn't detect any sign of a smile or a suppressed laugh on Gary's part. No, the guy was just sitting there like a half-grinning imbecile. And perhaps it was for this reason, or perhaps it was because of the ridiculousness of his having told the story of the butterfly dream in such an over-earnest manner. But whatever it may have been, Al soon found himself bursting out into uproarious laughter in spite of his efforts to control himself.

Al laughed and laughed, and the more he laughed, the more Gary's expression changed from calm satisfaction to one of wide-eyed surprise. Gary had told his stories and anecdotes to many people, and he'd received many different responses, but he'd never had anyone laugh at him like this before. And not only was this fellow laughing at him, but he was laughing so loud and so hard. Now that really hurt!

"That's really funny," said Al between laughs. "The way you said it..." And he looked over at Gary expecting to see him beaming at the success of his joke. But in place of a triumphant smile, he found instead an expression of shock and pain. And when he saw the wounds his laughter had caused, the mirth suddenly disappeared from his own kind eyes. "Hey man, I'm sorry. Were you serious? I thought you were kidding."

Of course he was serious. Did this fellow think he would joke about a question of such vital importance as that of self-identity?

"I hope I didn't hurt your feelings."

His feelings? It wasn't his feelings that were hurt. No, it was the very Tao that had been stung by this fellow's obscene laughter.

"I'm sorry, I really am."

Being sorry wasn't enough, not after what he'd done.

"Listen, I told you I'm sorry. Now would you please say something?"

"I have nothing to say to you," Gary said with great finality. And after that, the two of them lapsed into silence.

They rode along without a word and without a glance until Al finally spoke as he drove down an off-ramp and pulled into a hamburger stand. "I'm gonna get something to eat. You ate my lunch, you know... Do you want anything? A hamburger or something?"

"It's all the same to me."

"Is that a yes or a no?"

You fool! Did he have to spell it out to you? “In all things, I admit no personal or selfish consideration.”

“Is that right?... Well, I’ll get you one just so you don’t end up eating any more of mine,” said Al with soft sarcasm. And when it came time to place their drive-through order, he leaned toward the open window and spoke into the microphone, “Give me three hamburgers, two orders of fries, and two medium cokes.”

“Make mine a cheeseburger!” Gary called out on a sudden impulse, one that came to him from he knew not where.

“Make that two hamburgers and one cheeseburger,” Al said to the microphone, which acknowledged the revised order, then thanked him for having come to this particular hamburger stand and wished him a nice day.

Soon the two of them were driving down the freeway once again, eating their hamburgers as they went. And it was while his attention was thus focused upon his food that Gary felt himself overcome by another sudden impulse, an impulse to ask, “Is it okay to turn on the radio?”

“Sure, go ahead. Or put in a cassette if you like.”

“No, the radio’s fine.”

Gary played with the radio tuner until he found a station that was playing good, hard rock-and-roll, and then he sat back and returned his attention to the unfinished cheeseburger. He was feeling good now, stuffing his face while sitting back in a car with the radio blaring, and he was even beginning to feel a little bit better-disposed toward the driver of the car. After all, this fellow had given him a ride, hadn’t he? And he’d also given him three hamburgers—with the last one being a cheeseburger. So you know, maybe it was just possible that he wasn’t really all that bad after all.

Al must have sensed Gary’s warming attitude toward him, because at that very moment, he decided to resume the conversation by yelling above the music that was blasting out of the radio. “Where are you coming from?”

Gary waved a hand in a gesture he was sure the other would understand.

“Well, where is it you’re from originally?”

Gary waved his hand again.

“What’s that supposed to mean? Someplace far away? or you don’t remember?”

Gary waved his hand again, but this time Al didn’t answer the gesture, apparently having given up on trying to interpret it. Hoping to keep the conversation alive, though, Gary now made a new gesture in which he pointed at Al.

“Me? I’m from around here. Grew up in this area right here.”

Gary continued with another new gesture, one whose meaning was lost on Al.

“Hey listen, why don’t you speak instead of waving at me? I mean, maybe you said some strange things before, but at least I could tell what you were saying.”

“One who speaks Truth speaks hardly at all.” Gary said it in a normal tone of voice so that it was barely audible above the radio.

“You’re really big on Truth, aren’t you?”

“Yes, you could say that.”

“What type of Truth? Something from some school of mysticism? Like say from Taoism?”

Gary nodded.

“That’s what I figured from the way you told the story of the butterfly dream.”

“Oh, so you’ve heard it before?”

“Hasn’t everybody?”

Everybody? No, that couldn’t be or people wouldn’t give Gary such strange, surprised looks whenever he told them the story.

They drove along without speaking after that, just listening to the ear-shattering music, until finally Al reached over to lower the volume and ask another question. “And what have you learned in all your wanderings?”

Learned?

“I mean, is there anything you’ve really learned? anything you could teach me?”

“About the Tao?”

“About whatever. About the Tao or anything else.”

“If one asks about the Tao and another answers him, neither of them knows it.”

“Right. I’ve heard that one before, too. I shoulda been expecting it.” Al thought a moment and then spoke again. “So you won’t answer questions about the Tao because you know it?”

Gary nodded.

“You mean to say you know the Tao?”

“Yes, I do.”

“You know all its secrets and the ways it functions and all the rest?”

What was this fellow driving at? “Yes, I do. I know the Tao.”

“But I’ve always heard that those who know don’t speak, and those who speak don’t know. And you just spoke.”

Al smiled at Gary who once again felt offended—or rather who felt that the Tao had been offended—and Gary searched about until he came up with an adequate reply. “A dog isn’t reckoned good because it barks well, and a man isn’t reckoned wise because he speaks well.”

Gary thought this would silence this philosophical adversary of his and force him to admit defeat, but instead the statement had a completely different effect. Instead it made Al burst out in a new round of laughter, and this in spite of his efforts not to offend the poor, deluded fool. But offend him it did. It offended him and it offended the Tao, and as a way of showing his disapproval for the repeated assaults on the Tao, Gary reached over and turned the radio to maximum volume. That would show this crude fellow that the conversation was over and at the same time drown out his laughter.

After a time, the car pulled off the freeway and took a smaller highway that sliced its way through a lush forest. And they continued on for a number of miles through the forest until they came to a particularly pleasant-looking turnout, at which point Al pulled over and stopped and said to Gary, “Piss break.”

They both got out of the car, and Al walked off into the woods as Gary stood and watched him go. There was something about the way this fellow moved, thought Gary, something that gave the impression of his being at home in this natural setting, of his being in harmony with the natural world. And as Gary watched him go, he found himself falling prey to self-doubt. Was it possible that this fellow was more truly in tune with the ways of Nature than Gary himself was? This appeared to be a distinct possibility, for next to the naturalness that exuded from him as he walked, Gary’s own naturalness seemed somehow forced and artificial. It seemed like something he’d learned from a book rather than from Nature itself.

But Gary didn’t like self-doubt, and he soon put these thoughts out of his head. How could this fellow possibly be in harmony with Nature when he repeatedly laughed at the Tao? That was a ridiculous idea.

Gary relieved himself and then wandered around for a few minutes looking at the large, well-developed trees that grew in this stretch of forest, when Destiny called his attention to a particularly huge tree a short distance off. (Yes, you heard me right. It was Destiny that called his attention to this tree, for though in the comfort of the car he’d nearly forgotten about Destiny, now that he was out walking around in the woods, it was once again speaking to him in the same old way.) He went over to look at the tree more closely and made a rather long trip around its base, after which he stopped to ponder the venerable ancient.

And when Al came over to see what his passenger was up to, Gary turned and spoke to him. “You see this giant tree? Do you wonder how it is that it attained such a size?”

Al decided to humor him. “How’s that?”

“It’s because the wood of this tree is useless. If it were used to make a house or a piece of furniture, the object would soon fall to pieces. And if it were used to make a fire, it would sputter and smoke. So for this reason, no one has ever bothered to cut it down. It has been allowed to grow for so many years and to become so huge for no other reason than because of its uselessness.”

Al tried not to laugh at this statement since he didn’t want to offend this poor, simple-minded sucker for a third time, but though he managed to suppress his laughter, he couldn’t resist the temptation of giving him another explanation for the tree’s longevity. “Of course, the fact that it’s illegal to cut trees in this area might help a little bit, too.”

The sarcasm of this remark was totally lost on Gary, though, as he answered, “Perhaps.”

So feeling that it was best to leave it at this for now and not push the discussion of the tree any further, the two of them soon returned to the car and resumed their journey to the coast. But they hadn’t gone far when Gary re-opened the conversation by asking, “Why is it that you always try to look at things from the lowest, most common perspective possible?”

“Do I?”

“Yes. For instance with that tree. The only explanation you can see for its attaining such proportions is to say that it’s protected by the government.”

“Well, it *is* in a protected area.”

“But what about its uselessness? What about the uselessness of its wood as a building material?”

“You want me to give you a straight answer on that?”

“Yes, I most certainly do.”

“Well then I’ll tell you. The truth of the matter is that the wood isn’t useless at all.”

“No?”

“No. In fact, it makes great houses that last for a long, long time. And many of these trees were cut down before the government moved to protect them.”

“They were?” Gary’s reply was listless, and it contained a certain air of defeat.

“You know, you might try checking some of those things out before you go spouting off all that mystico-babble of yours.”

Gary was silent for the next several miles as he summoned up the courage to launch another attack on Al. “You certainly like to put down the higher perspectives that the human mind is capable of attaining, don’t you? Like look at the way you’re always laughing at the insights I get from those perspectives.”

“It wasn’t your insights I was laughing at.” And as soon as he’d said it, he knew it was a mistake.

“It wasn’t? So then you were laughing at me, were you?”

Al didn’t want to admit the truth, or at least not right in Gary’s face, so he tried to talk his way around the question. “No, it’s just the... the... circumstances. Yeah, that’s what it was. I laughed because of the circumstances when you said those things.”

The circumstances? Gary didn’t know what he meant by that, but then he thought that maybe it would be better not to ask for any further explanation. There was no use fishing for an insult.

After a pause, Al spoke again. “Now don’t get me wrong. I have nothing against higher perspectives, and I think they’re fine in their place.”

“In their place?”

“Yeah, you know what I mean.”

Gary had no idea what he meant.

“In areas where they’re applicable... where they’re appropriate.”

“Oh...?”

“I mean like the way they’re useful for dealing with transcendental questions.”

“But is there any question, no matter how minor, that isn’t somehow transcendental?”

“Well, yeah, you could say that...”

“So admitting this, now what’s your real objection to higher perspectives?” Gary felt his confidence returning thanks to this brief admission.

“It’s just... It’s just...” Al was searching. “It’s just that with most day-to-day questions, it’s much easier to answer the more superficial part of the question and leave the transcendental aspect to be dealt with at a more convenient time.”

“How do you mean?”

“Like take for instance when I asked you your name. It would have been much easier for you to just tell me your name rather than describing the butterfly dream to me.”

“But then you would have missed the important question of self-identity, of who we really are.”

“Yeah, but at that moment, I wasn’t asking you who we really are. I was just trying to come up with some name I could call you besides ‘hey you.’”

“A very lowly ambition,” said Gary condescendingly.

“You’re right about that. But then we spend most of our lives dealing with lowly, day-to-day questions.”

“But we don’t have to.”

“Yes, we do... Or that is, we do if we want to survive, since survival is a day-to-day thing.”

“So you’re saying that you want to immerse yourself in the lower aspects of the world in order to guarantee your survival? Well, what about the fact that by doing this, you create a situation where the you that survives is a very low form of yourself? It’s a you that’s living far below your true potential.”

“No, wait a minute. That’s not what I’m saying at all. I’m not talking about high forms or low forms or anything else. All I’m saying is that in every situation, we should use the perspective that’s most adequate to that situation, the one that’s most useful and practical. Like for instance when we’re in an area of forest that’s protected from logging by the government, we should consider that fact before we start turning to esoteric principles like the usefulness-of-being-useless in order to explain the great size and age of the trees.”

So he was still harping on that, huh?

“I just don’t think that we should automatically dismiss insights just because they come from lower perspectives is all,” he continued.

“But higher perspectives are... are... higher!”

“Right. Or at least that’s what we call them. But now tell me: From the highest of all mystical perspectives, what does it mean to say that something is high or low?”

“What does it mean? Why, that they’re high or low...”

“From a mystical perspective? From a perspective that’s beyond the concepts of high and low?”

“Well no, of course not. Not from that perspective. Those words would be meaningless...”

“Exactly. So then how are you to say that a higher perspective is any better than a lower one, or even to say that it’s actually ‘higher’ in any absolute sense?”

Gary was stymied by this question.

“And just how do we go about classifying all our perspectives on a scale of higher and lower, anyway? Where do we place each perspective? Like for instance our dreaming perspective. Where does that fit into your scale?”

“I don’t have a dream perspective.”

“You don’t? You never dream?”

“No, I don’t dream when I sleep, and I have no anxiety when I awaken.”

There he went with another one of those silly quotes of his. But Al wasn’t going to fight him on this point. Al was going to humor him. “Okay, so maybe you don’t dream, but I’m sure you did before, back when you were young.”

“Yes, I did... Long ago...”

“Then you must remember something about it, don’t you? Like you must remember how it was no ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ than your normal waking perspective, but rather it was simply different. It was nothing more than a variation.”

“Yes, but you see, that’s why I no longer have the dream perspective. It’s no higher than the common waking perspective, and so I’ve left both those perspectives behind.”

“Have you? Have you really?”

“Yes, of course!” Gary didn’t like being questioned on this point, and he especially didn’t like the tone and the insinuation he sensed within Al’s question. Because there was something about it that awakened a deep sense of insecurity within him. Something that awakened his dormant self-doubt.

“And you’re always in a higher perspective, one that’s far above the common perspective?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“And you never have to step back down to a lower perspective from time to time? You never have to abandon your higher perspective even for a moment?”

“No, never.” Gary went on answering the questions, but each time he spoke, there was a little less conviction in his voice.

“Then tell me why it was that your high perspective wanted you to eat a cheeseburger instead of a plain hamburger.”

Oh no, so he was going to bring that up! Gary thought. “Oh, that was nothing. That was just a... a...”

“A what? What was it?”

“Oh, never mind what it was.”

“Ah, come on and tell me. What was it? Was it a slip? Did you slip back into a lower perspective for a moment there?”

No, of course he didn't. He was incapable of slipping in that way. But how could he explain something so complex to an oaf like this?

“Well, it just goes to show you that while higher perspectives are fine for some things, lower ones are a whole lot better when it comes to eating cheeseburgers.”

Gary turned to look out the side window of the car at this point, doing his best to turn his back on Al who sat there chuckling softly. He could see that it was no use trying to hold an intelligent conversation with this ignorant and impudent fellow, and that the only way he'd ever be able to prove his point would be through a practical demonstration. It would be through performing some act that would show beyond all doubt the superiority of his higher perspective. And so as he sat there pouting, that was exactly what he resolved to do. He resolved to prove himself through some dramatic demonstration, and he further resolved to stage that demonstration as soon as the opportunity arose, as soon as Destiny gave him the go-ahead.

The two of them rode along in silence as the car left the forest and turned onto the highway running along the coast. And they drove for some time up this new road as it wound its way north, slicing across hillsides and clinging to cliffs that jutted out toward the sea while waves crashed against the rocks far below. And it was just as they approached a turn-out on one of these cliffs that Gary heard Destiny speak to him and tell him that this would be a good spot for his demonstration. “Stop here! Right here!”

No sooner had Al stopped the car than Gary was out and following the call of Destiny, crossing the road and walking along the cliff in the direction of the sea. He walked all the way out to the very brink of the cliff, out to where it fell in a sheer drop to the sea below, and then he turned around to face Al who was hurrying along behind him. And as he stood there, Gary smiled calmly back at his companion. He smiled in a way that would surely prove the superiority of his higher perspective by demonstrating the equanimity and indifference he felt while standing there in that dangerous spot. And deciding after a moment that he should make the demonstration even more dramatic, he began to shuffle slowly backward toward the precipice, smiling serenely as he did so. Al yelled at him to be careful, but he paid no attention. He just smiled and shuffled, continuing to move backward until his feet were hanging partway over the edge of the cliff, at which point he stopped and his smile grew even larger.

There! Gary said to himself. This will show that doubting... Whoa, wait a minute! What's happening? It feels like something is pulling me backward. It feels like some force is making me lean in that direction, making me lose my balance. But I can't... I can't... Oh no, I am! I'm falling off the cliff!!

But could this be an accident? Gary continued. Or is this Destiny? Is it Destiny that's pulling me toward the water? Yes, that has to be it. This has to be the work of Destiny.

So Gary relaxed and let himself fall, let himself be carried by Destiny down to the water. And through a stroke of good fortune, he happened to land just on the crest of a wave so that the water absorbed most of the impact before he hit the rocks on the bottom. He resurfaced soon after hearing Destiny tell him to swim upward, and then once on the surface, he let out a loud laugh of triumph and relief at the success of this unexpected second part of his demonstration.

Al crept out and peered over the edge of the cliff, and he got there just in time to see Gary's laugh being buried beneath a breaking wave. So the lucky fool had survived the fall, huh? And he might even survive this whole experience if only he could find someplace to climb out of the water. And with that thought in mind, Al quickly surveyed the situation before running off toward a path that led down to a small beach some distance away.

Gary didn't laugh again after the mouthful of water he swallowed from that wave, but he was swelling with confidence as he lay back to present the next phase of his demonstration. Yes that's right, the next phase, for this demonstration of his was far from over, because now that he was in the water, he was sure that Destiny wanted him to demonstrate his ability to follow the Tao of that water. And so he floated effortlessly and offered no resistance to the motion of the waves as they tossed him about at their will, and he didn't even react when more of them broke over his head. The only thing he did was to cough a few times. And in fact, he didn't even react the first time a wave carried him in and smashed him into the base of the cliff, bruising his shoulder and leg where he hit. For he was in such complete harmony with the water that he offered no resistance whatsoever.

And it wasn't until he felt a second wave picking him up and preparing to smash him into the cliff once again that he had a sudden impulse to try to ward off the impact. It didn't do him much good as this wave crunched him against the cliff just like the previous one had. But this first impulse was followed by a second, even stronger one. An impulse that told him to swim away from there.

Gary didn't know where this impulse came from. It was obvious that it didn't come from Destiny, since it didn't speak to him in the same way that Destiny always had, but rather it seemed to come from somewhere within himself. And though he didn't know quite where it came from, he did know that it grew stronger with each wave that picked him up and threatened to smash him into the cliff. And the stronger the impulse grew, the harder he swam, the harder he tried to get away.

He was growing desperate as he fought to avoid being crushed to death against the cliff, and the more desperate he became, the more he forgot about ideas like Destiny and the Tao of the water. Instead, he became increasingly absorbed in the impulse to save himself. For in truth, that was the impulse he'd been feeling. That was the impulse that had been taking control of him: It was the will to live, the will to survive. It was will with a small w.

Gary flailed away, swimming with all his strength, and soon he heard Al's voice calling to him from the small beach off in the distance. And though he couldn't tell what it was that Al was saying, he understood the situation well enough to know that he should turn his efforts in that direction. He swam and swam, and he made some headway toward the beach, though he found himself beginning to tire. He was growing more tired with each stroke he took, but no

matter how tired he became, he refused to give up. For the will inside him had grown to enormous proportions, and it drew from him a nearly super-human effort. He swam and fought and swam some more, but in spite of all his efforts, he found himself nearing the limits of his strength. He found himself nearing the limits of his overwhelming will to survive. His strength was ebbing away, and his will was beginning to falter. He could feel that the end was drawing near. But then just when he was about to give up, just when he was about to surrender to the inevitable, he suddenly felt Al's hand grab him by the shirt. And the feeling of that hand, the feeling of help having finally arrived, gave him a fresh burst of will and energy. And so together the two of them continued the struggle—on and on through the surging water—until finally they reached the beach and salvation.

They crawled and dragged themselves up the beach to a spot where they were well clear of the water, and then they sprawled out on the sand, unable to move any further in their utter exhaustion. Gary fell and rolled onto his back, and there he lay panting heavily and staring up at the sky, too tired even to think.

He lay there like that for several minutes, staring blankly at the sky, when all at once he was struck by an awareness. It was a sudden, bright awareness of just exactly what it was that he was seeing, an awareness of the fact that he was seeing the sky. And it was an awareness of the fact that the sky he was seeing was blue. Not just any blue, either, but a deep, vivid, luminous blue, a shining, intense blue, a blue that seemed almost supernatural in its beauty. And as he looked, he asked himself why it was that he hadn't noticed it before. Had it been because he'd been so preoccupied with Destiny and all its related bullshit that he'd never even taken the time to look up at the sky? How could he have done that? How could he have ignored the sky when it was so very beautiful? The blue sky and the white clouds and the light, the tremendous light.

He looked at the sky for a long time, marveling at its blueness and at the way the clouds floated across its face. And as he looked at the sky, he felt alive, truly alive for the first time ever. He felt as though he'd just been born at that moment and as though he was seeing the world for the very first time.

After awhile, he looked over at Al who was still lying on the sand beside him, and then he spoke. "Hey, Al."

Al stirred and turned his head toward Gary. "What?"

"Tell me, are you Al or are you a butterfly?"

Gary began to laugh weakly at his joke, and Al answered him with a tired grin. Gary saw the grin, and he saw why Al had laughed at him earlier, and it made him laugh harder. Al's grin grew bigger as Gary laughed, and the more his grin grew, the harder Gary laughed. It soon reached the point where Al began laughing, too, and this really set Gary off. Al's laughter grew louder as it fed off Gary's, and Gary's laughter grew even stronger as it fed off Al's, and Al's laughter grew louder...

Until finally both of them were laughing hysterically.